

# **ELECTIONS IN THE BALTIC STATES AND SOVIET REPUBLICS**

**A Compendium of Reports on  
Parliamentary Elections Held in 1990**

**Compiled by the Staff of the  
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe  
Washington, DC**

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## FOREWORD

In 1990, the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe ("Helsinki Commission") embarked on a new enterprise. The unraveling of communist rule in Europe, the Baltic States and in parts of the Soviet Union led the Commission to expand its focus beyond the traditional human rights concerns enshrined in early CSCE documents. With Marxism-Leninism having been discredited in the entire region as a source of legitimacy, and the spread among the masses -- and often elites -- of notions of popular sovereignty, new yardsticks became possible and necessary for measuring "progress." As human rights violations had produced human rights monitors in the 1970s, so now did elections -- symbol, goal, vehicle, cause and effect of change -- generate election observers.

Beginning in February, Commission staffers traveled to Central and Eastern Europe, the Baltic States and the Soviet Union to gather first-hand information for reports about these elections. In July, the Commission published a collection of reports on elections in Central and Eastern Europe. Now, with this compendium on elections to parliaments in the Baltic States and the Soviet republics, the Commission completes its survey of "The Year of Elections" in what used to be called the Soviet bloc.

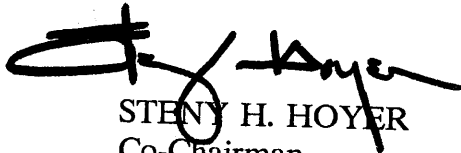
Both companion volumes are reports of "on-site inspections." Envisioned as a mix of journalism and academic disciplines, they rely heavily on the actual observation of voting and interviews with local political actors -- official and unofficial -- in an attempt to reproduce "snapshots" of the political and atmospheric environment of the elections. The analysis of the political implications of the results was done back in Washington, after the heat of the moment, in a synthesis of reflection and informed speculation.

The two volumes differ, however, in their geographic scope and claims to completeness. Commission staffers, and occasionally Commission members, covered all elections in Central and Eastern Europe. Unfortunately, it was not possible to send staffers to Armenia, Belorussia and the Central Asian republics (Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Kirgizia). And all members of the U.S. Congress were specifically barred by Soviet authorities from observing elections in the Baltic States and the Soviet republics. Nevertheless, Commission staffers have been following events in all the republics and the general remarks in the introduction apply as a whole to the Baltic States and the entire Soviet Union.

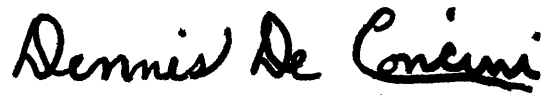
As pointed out in the introduction, these Supreme Soviet elections, an initiative that President Gorbachev promoted in 1989, have proved to be an historic stage in the democratization of the USSR. It is therefore a fitting commentary on their significance that, as 1990 ends, two quite different scenarios on the future of free elections in the Soviet Union have come to the fore. On the one hand, there appear to be moves afoot in Moscow to undermine the democratic process, if not undo it entirely by dissolving elected legislatures in the Baltic States and some Soviet republics and introducing

presidential rule. But one also hears of demands from below to hold new elections to republic Supreme Soviets, in which the Communist Party apparatus would be deprived of the various advantages it has enjoyed in all elections held thus far in the Soviet Union.

Much will depend on which of these two scenarios materializes. Whatever happens, the Helsinki Commission will continue to track these developments closely and to report to the Congress, the Administration, and the public -- in the United States, in the Baltic States and in the Soviet Union.



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## INTRODUCTION

Reflecting on the stunning developments in the Soviet Union over the last several years leads one to formulate a whole series of questions that begin "Who would have thought that...?" With respect to the cycle of Supreme Soviet elections in the Baltic States and the 12 Soviet republics that has now ended, such a question might go: "Who would have thought that when Mikhail Gorbachev, facing increasingly politicized coal miners on strike in the summer of 1989, agreed to let republics organize elections to their legislatures, or Supreme Soviets, that it would come to this?" A harried Mikhail Gorbachev must be asking himself the same question these days.

Gorbachev's concession to the coal miners, of course, just fleshed out some details in a larger process of his own making. As perestroika developed, one of its key guiding principles was decentralization; the June 1988 Communist Party Conference had accordingly called for expanding the rights of republics. Far more important, however, was the impact of the Congress of People's Deputies, which convened in May 1989. Once Gorbachev created an all-Union legislature elected on a partially democratic basis -- a landmark in his campaign to undercut the power of the Communist Party and its ability to impede his economic reforms -- new elections to republic legislatures were sure to follow.

But in a repressive multi-national state divided into nationally-based republics, the combination of elections and glasnost has proved explosive. Encouraged by the country's top leadership to take responsibility for their own governance, and finally unafraid to express pent-up national grievances and longings, the peoples of the various republics have gone to the polls to choose their lawmakers. The results have been dramatic. For the first time, republic legislatures have taken on genuine significance. The election campaigns and the actions of newly-elected Supreme Soviets have been instrumental in fostering the most fundamental reform processes in the USSR.

These include the abolition of the Communist Party's constitutionally mandated monopoly of power and the introduction of multi-party elections; a legitimized parliamentary opposition in the republics; the loss of communist control of the Baltic legislatures; the elaboration by republic Communist Parties of their own programs and statutes; Lithuania's declaration of independence; the meteoric rise of Boris Yeltsin, transformed from "Communist Party maverick" to "Russian nationalist" politician; the accelerating series of sovereignty declarations; the all-consuming, all-embracing conflict between center and republics, pointing to the possible disintegration of the USSR; and, finally, Gorbachev's feverish efforts to stitch the union together via a new Union Treaty.

For a graphic sense of the impact of the republic Supreme Soviet elections, one need only compare the change in atmosphere and shift in centers of power in the Soviet Union over the past year. In November 1989, observers of the Soviet political scene were

still hopefully abuzz about the prospects of the Congress of People's Deputies and the Supreme Soviet, while conservative Prime Minister Nikolay Ryzhkov was griping about Gorbachev's transfer of authority from the CPSU to the infant parliament. One year later, all these institutions had fallen into disrepute or irrelevance. Supreme Soviet deputies complained bitterly to Gorbachev of their impotence, groaning that their laws went unheeded in the republics and questioning the sense and purpose of their labors. As for the CPSU, it lay neglected in the corner, surrounded by truculent defenders mostly from the military and Party apparatus. Gorbachev's critics on the right -- now joined by the Nobel Peace Prize winner himself -- were still gnashing their teeth, but out of frustration over the devolution of power from the discredited and increasingly ineffectual center to the republic legislatures.

Lost from most people's sight in the sweeping rush of sovereignty declarations in 1990 is where and when this fashionable trend started. In fact, ironically enough, the most serious threat since World War II to the structural integrity of the largest country on earth was peacefully launched from tiny Estonia. In November 1988, fearful that changes proposed by Gorbachev to the Soviet constitution would endanger republic rights, Estonia took an unprecedented step. Arguing that the constitution designated republics as "sovereign socialist states," its Supreme Soviet yielded to the prodding of the Estonian Popular Front and declared "sovereignty." Henceforth, Soviet laws would not enter into force in Estonia without ratification by the Estonian Supreme Soviet. In response to this quiet defiance, Moscow harrumphed a good deal but ultimately could only muster a lame decree on the impropriety of Estonia's declaration. The world has never been the same since.

Throughout the process, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia have played a pioneering and galvanizing role. The rise of Baltic popular fronts, which Gorbachev promoted in mid-1988, created a *de facto* multi-party system under the guise of umbrella organizations that embraced communists and non-communists ostensibly united in support of perestroika. The collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe in late 1989 further emboldened opposition forces inside the USSR, where pressures to open the Soviet political system grew irresistible. Contests in which non-communists could compete for seats in representative bodies took place for the first time in local elections in Estonia and Latvia on December 10. The same month, Lithuania ignored Moscow's rumblings and, in preparation for its February 14, 1990 Supreme Soviet election, was the first to abrogate officially the CPSU's constitutionally mandated monopoly on power. At the February Central Committee plenum, Gorbachev himself, reversing his earlier dismissal of a multi-party system as "rubbish," proposed amending the Soviet constitution along the same lines. The republic Supreme Soviet elections that followed, even if they took place in the absence of clear laws on political parties, nevertheless permitted non-communist groups, as well as unaffiliated individuals, to compete and campaign.

But holding elections in a period of heightened national consciousness ensured that the central issue of the election in republics where such consciousness was most developed would be the relationship between non-Russian republic legislatures and the Russian-ruled center. This brought to the forefront demands for independence, and made likely the rise to power of intellectuals and artists, the primary articulators of national consciousness. It also led minority groups, which had already begun organizing in some republics to protest what they saw as aggressive "majority" nationalism, to intensify their efforts to gain parliamentary representation. In a word, the call for elections crystallized political and national differences within the social structures of the republics and focused everyone's attention on the prospects of winning power and influence through the electoral process.

Naturally enough, given the diversity of conditions over the USSR's vast expanses, election-generated reforms have not developed uniformly or at the same speed throughout the country. Non-communist nationalist groups have won control of legislatures in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Georgia and Armenia. Lithuania and Armenia have already declared their independence, the others have made clear their intention to do so. Moldavia's Supreme Soviet has not yet proclaimed its intentions, but the pro-independence Moldavian Popular Front is the dominant group in parliament.

In the Slavic republics, the Belorussian Supreme Soviet remains in the thrall of communist arch-conservatives, although about one-third of the deputies belong to the "Democratic Club." Pro-independence sentiment in Ukraine, even with its "Rukh" opposition only a strong minority in the legislature, has surged with surprising speed and swelled beyond its expected geographic boundaries. As for the Russian republic, it has provided the base for the astonishing political career of Boris Yeltsin and his historic challenge to Mikhail Gorbachev. In fact, whatever turns Yeltsin's career may take, the rise of Russian nationalism and demands for Russian sovereignty may well be the most fateful development of the last five years in the USSR.

There has been relatively little change in Central Asia. After elections that exemplified spruced up "old thinking," the Communist Party still maintains a numerical majority in the Supreme Soviets in Kazakhstan, Kirgizia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, where opposition groups complain about official unwillingness to reform. Azerbaijan's election took place in a state of emergency that has remained in effect since the Soviet army's "pacification" of Baku in January 1990, and which allowed the Party to crush its muzzled opposition. The communist leaderships of these republics have, however, been more assertively presenting republic demands and priorities to Moscow.

How, then, to characterize the general level of democratization in the USSR on the basis of these elections? To begin with, the one-party system is finished. But if non-communist groups were nowhere officially barred from participation, the Communist Party everywhere enjoyed enormous advantages, including virtual monopoly control of print

media and printing facilities, a well-established organizational base and unrivaled financial resources and patronage possibilities. In fact, given these advantages, the Party's resounding defeat in various republics was a telling demonstration of its political bankruptcy.

The laws that governed the conduct of the elections -- irrespective of how scrupulously observed or blatantly violated they were by the Party -- differed in important respects and generally reflected the correlation of forces between the Party and the opposition. A good illustration of this proposition were the vastly different electoral experiences in the last two elections. Azerbaijan's election law permitted the authorities to exclude "people kept under guard by a decision of the criminal court," which, according to local sources, allowed them to bar many opposition candidates. Georgia's law, by contrast, contained remarkable protections for non-communist parties and candidates (although these guarantees did not extend to non-Georgian parties, whose ability to participate was severely constrained).

Despite the variety of these elections, their outcomes and consequences, all republic legislatures by the end of 1990 had declared sovereignty and proclaimed the primacy of their own laws over those passed in the all-Union Supreme Soviet in Moscow.<sup>1</sup> The refusal of these parliaments, backed by their electorates, to continue obeying Moscow's dictates has produced a constitutional crisis of the first order. Its outcome is still uncertain and much will hinge on the future of this confrontation. Here are just a few of its ramifications.

First, the republic Supreme Soviet elections had a direct impact on the status and prospects of Mikhail Gorbachev. By endorsing in the republics the principle that the elected have a right to govern, Gorbachev endangered his own position. The President of the Soviet Union got his job, after all, not by winning a popular election but with the majority of votes in the Congress of People's Deputies -- a body he has controlled since its inception. Next to the elected leaders of some of the republics, Mikhail Gorbachev by his own lights has no right to govern, however eager he may be to rule. It is noteworthy, in this connection, that while Gorbachev may accuse republic legislatures of nationalist, separatist sins and threaten to introduce presidential rule, he has *not* publicly questioned their legitimacy. How could he?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>In fact, declarations of sovereignty had been issued by pre-election Supreme Soviets in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldavia. The post-election declarations, however, enjoyed greater authority and were more radical.

<sup>2</sup>The legitimacy of republic Supreme Soviets has, however, been rejected from the beginning in Estonia, Latvia and Georgia by radical opposition groups not bound by Gorbachev's circumspection. After a quick start, their efforts to create alternative parliaments have lately lost some steam.



More threatening to Gorbachev are the implications of the republics' claim to legislative primacy. For if republic law takes precedence over all-Union legislation and republic Supreme Soviets are now drafting their own constitutions, an all-Union legislative body becomes superfluous. Without it, Gorbachev has no institutional leg to stand on, since his chances in a popular election, according to public opinion surveys, have shrunk dramatically. If the all-Union Congress of People's Deputies and Supreme Soviet disappear, he would need to create some other central base, which would function not as a legislature but perhaps as a coordinating mechanism between the republics and whatever becomes of the center. This could prove difficult, given Gorbachev's need to win the leadership of such a body through an election, and Boris Yeltsin's stated preference for "a small center."

Second, the republics' declarations of sovereignty inspired imitators on the regional level who asserted their own grievances and sovereignty against republic authorities whom they now openly consider overlords. For republic politicians, the corrosive downward spread of democracy, which one Soviet political commentator called "sovereignty mania," was sobering. Boris Yeltsin, for instance, missed no opportunity in the second half of 1990 to proclaim that Gorbachev and his "center" could not boss around the giant Russian Republic. His enthusiastic support for democracy from the bottom up must have tasted somewhat sour, however, when he found himself the target of similar accusations and measures from the RSFSR's Autonomous Republics, Oblasts and Okrugs. Not for nothing does the RSFSR's draft constitution reaffirm Moscow's control over autonomous territories.

The same thing happened outside the RSFSR, where the national cast of regional and local sovereignty declarations has been especially pronounced. In Georgia, Ossetians and Abkhazians have declared sovereignty, which has led Georgia to revoke Southern Ossetia's autonomy; Russians in Estonia, who have no formal autonomy, have long been threatening to secede and join the RSFSR; and the efforts by Russians and Gagauz to escape Moldavian jurisdiction have already led to violence. Thus far, Moscow's response to such intra-republic separatism has varied, from condemnation in Georgia (Eduard Shevardnadze's home base) to none-too-subtle encouragement in the RSFSR, as a means of weakening Boris Yeltsin. In any event, the sanctification of the idea of sovereignty will necessitate tough decisions about what constitutes a proper and sufficient basis for it. Nationality? But what is a "nation?" Size? But how large is sufficient? And who decides?

Third, newly elected legislatures have often found themselves unable to actualize their declarations and protestations of sovereignty. Boris Yeltsin, chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the largest, richest and most powerful republic, trumpeted his resolve to plow ahead with radical economic reform but ultimately had to pull up short before Gorbachev's recalcitrance. Recent opinion polls demonstrate growing public disenchantment with what seems like endless debate by legislatures incapable of implementing reforms that might alleviate economic woes, and even some liberal political commentators have called for a

"strong hand." (Cynics might suspect that Gorbachev and his advisors had foreseen this outcome when they agreed to republic elections.) Such trends, if they continue, could undermine popular support for political reform and jeopardize the progress of democratization in the republics.

Fourth, republics seeking to make their own way, and forced by economic decline to make their own deals, have concluded agreements on economic, scientific and cultural cooperation among themselves. This growing tendency to bypass the center promises to create a widely ramified network of mutually-beneficial, horizontal links. But republics left to face each other without central intermediacy may also have to address competing territorial claims: Ukraine may clash with Moldavia over Bukovina, Estonia with Russia, Lithuania with Belorussia, and Georgia with all of its neighbors. The tragic history of Armenia and Azerbaijan locked in conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh needs no comment. Granted, it has been in Moscow's interest to present itself as the arbitrator of these clashes. But without Moscow's involvement, the republics will have nobody to blame if knotty issues are not resolved. From this perspective, being responsible and accountable to highly nationalistic masses may well test the leadership and courage of elected representatives and complicate political solutions.

Confronting the powerful centrifugal forces generated and accelerated by the republic Supreme Soviet elections, Gorbachev has placed his hopes on a new Union Treaty. The response to his initiative so far has given him few grounds for optimism. Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Armenia and Georgia have flatly refused to sign any such document. Russia and Ukraine have said they will not sign it until their legislatures adopt new constitutions that protect their sovereignty. Even the conservative Central Asian republics have insisted on important amendments.

Perhaps in anticipation of this hostile reception, the draft Union Treaty does not specifically state that republic Supreme Soviets must ratify the new agreement. In fact, Gorbachev at the Congress of People's Deputies on December 17 proposed gaining popular approval of the Union Treaty through country-wide referendums. Given the institutionalization of electoral politics throughout the USSR, however, this effort to bypass the republic parliaments is highly problematical. A Union Treaty not ratified by elected republic Supreme Soviets will enjoy dubious legitimacy, except perhaps among national minorities within the republics -- a scenario that risks even deeper and more convoluted constitutional conflicts and, quite possibly, violence.

The question of republic sovereignty that Estonia raised in November 1988 and that the republic Supreme Soviet elections have now brought to a head remains unresolved. The Kremlin is a prisoner of its own terminology and its unwillingness under Gorbachev -- thus far -- to employ mass repression to keep people and peoples from taking its terminology seriously. For years, the Soviet constitution described republics as "sovereign." Gorbachev can no longer retract or change this word: he can only try to

convince the republics to accept his definition of its scope, and therein lies the rub. They will not. As Edgar Savisaar, then a leader of the Estonian Popular Front and today Estonia's Prime Minister, said in November 1988 of the novel constitutional conflict between the Soviet government and Estonia, "both we and Moscow cited one and the same Soviet constitution; at times we even cited the same statutes, yet we interpret them in completely different ways." One man's sovereignty is another man's servitude.

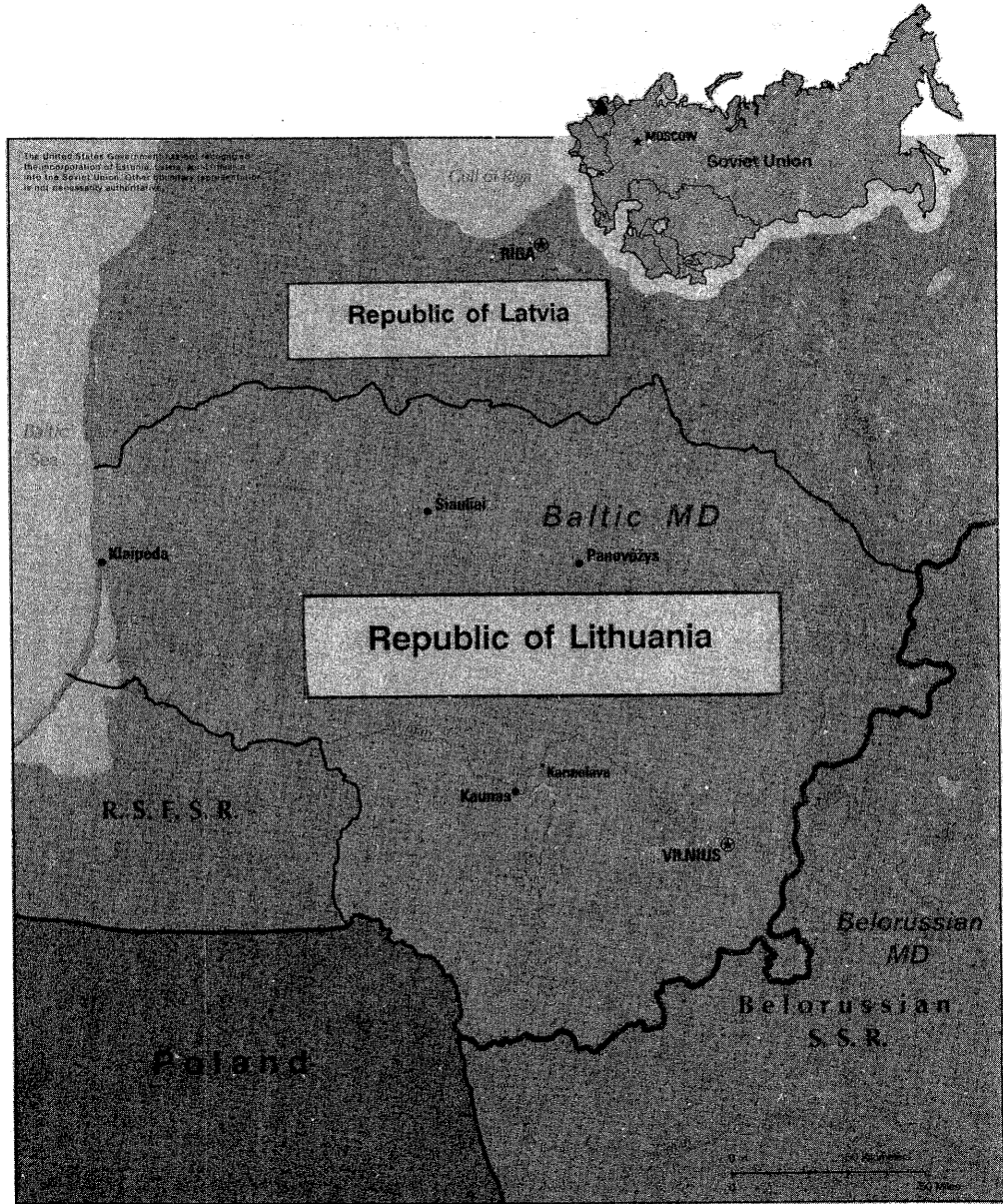
Soviet republics were sovereign according to the Soviet constitution long before Mikhail Gorbachev came to power. But he must bear the responsibility for introducing into Soviet political life the principle set forth in his draft Union Treaty -- otherwise a very reactionary document -- that "republics recognize the common fundamental principle of democracy based on popular representation and seek the creation of a rule-of-law state."

A noble idea. The U.S. delegation to the April 1989 CSCE Meeting on the Human Dimension in Paris proposed that participating states affirm their support for free elections. Since then, Mikhail Gorbachev's government has done so, most recently in the Charter of Paris for a New Europe signed in November 1990. But it is striking that the draft Union Treaty, which carefully distinguishes between Union and republics, ascribes only to the latter this recognition of democracy based on representation. 1990 has demonstrated that the republics -- unevenly, to be sure, and with varying degrees of conviction -- accept the proposition. 1991 will show whether the Union is prepared to let them act on it.



# REPORT ON THE FEBRUARY 24, 1990 SUPREME SOVIET ELECTIONS IN LITHUANIA

Vilnius, Lithuania



March 6, 1990

*This report is based on the findings of a Helsinki Commission staff delegation to Vilnius, Lithuania, from February 21 through February 26, 1990. The delegation interviewed representatives of the Communist Party, the Lithuanian Reform Movement Sajudis, the Lithuanian Democratic, Christian Democratic, Social Democratic and Green Parties, Yedinstvo, the Union of Poles in Lithuania, and various other organizations and minority groups. Officials from district and republic-level electoral commissions, as well as candidates, their supporters and the voters at the polls, were also interviewed.*

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## SUMMARY

- The results of the February 24 Lithuanian Supreme Soviet elections -- the first multi-party elections to take place under Soviet power -- pave the way for a dramatic confrontation, possibly within a week, between Vilnius and Moscow over the question of independence.
- This unprecedented exercise in representative government came off without a hitch; despite some complaints, the elections appeared to be reasonably free and fair.
- Most run-off elections, originally scheduled for March 10, were moved up in order to assure a quorum and convene the parliament by March 10 or 11 -- before March 12, when the Congress of People's Deputies in Moscow is expected to grant Gorbachev expanded presidential powers that might allow him to move against the independence-bound Lithuanians.
- In the first two rounds, candidates supported by the pro-independence movement Sajudis have won 89 of the 141 seats in the new parliament (25 seats are still to be determined). Sajudis-backed candidates are guaranteed a comfortable majority in the new parliament.
- Efforts by Lithuanian communists to enhance their popularity by jumping on the independence bandwagon and splitting off from the Soviet Communist Party (CPSU) brought them minimal electoral success. So far, communists have gained only 38 of 116 seats -- 31 of these went to the "independent" faction of the Lithuanian Communist Party. Communists, whether independent or loyal to Moscow, will constitute a minority in the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet. This is the first time that communists will not control a republic legislature in the USSR.
- Sajudis control of the legislature may have immediate consequences: it appears that the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet is planning to adopt a resolution on independence from the Soviet Union during its first convocation to forestall any preemptive measures by Moscow. Sajudis-backed members of the new Supreme Soviet have put together negotiating teams for talks with Moscow about restoring Lithuania's statehood.
- The victory of pro-independence forces in the Lithuanian elections poses difficult problems for Gorbachev: unless Moscow is prepared to stop the independence steamroller, Lithuania appears headed out of the Soviet Union.
- The Sajudis victory also presents Washington with difficult questions: what to do if Moscow moves against Lithuania or if Lithuania declares independence and appeals to Washington for recognition?

## THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

### Introduction

All political thought and activity in Lithuania is currently focused on the question of Lithuania's relationship to the Soviet Union. Lithuania's independent statehood, guaranteed in a 1920 peace treaty with Moscow, ended with the Soviet occupation in 1940. For the past two years, in a peaceful, orderly manner, using the language of self-determination and exploiting the democratic and organizational possibilities Mikhail Gorbachev has made available, the majority of the Lithuanian population (3.7 million, 80 percent of which is Lithuanian) has made clear its intention to seek the restoration of independent statehood.

On February 24, 1990, the people of Lithuania voted on candidates to a newly restructured 141-member parliament -- the Supreme Soviet -- in the first multi-party elections under Soviet power. As was widely predicted, the preliminary results confirmed the victory of pro-independence forces. Many expect the newly elected legislature to declare formally Lithuania's independence sometime in 1990, and possibly as early as March.

Even if independence were not a issue, the elections have resulted in a restructured legislature no longer controlled by communists. This development marks a watershed in the ongoing transformation of relations between Lithuania and the Soviet Union and, by extension, between Moscow and all of the Soviet Unions's non-Russian republics. It has important implications for the international diplomatic agenda and for the United States as well.

### The New Political Scene in Lithuania

From the end of World War II until 1988, the Communist Party was the only legal political party in Soviet-occupied Lithuania. On December 7, 1989, the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet abolished the Communist Party's monopoly on political power and legalized a multi-party system, but even before this formality, many movements had emerged and had acquired political influence in Lithuania. Most prominent among them is Sajudis, or the Lithuanian Reform Movement.

Three political parties are formally registered; each has held a founding congress and received official status which grants them state support. These parties were joined by several other movements and organizations in fielding candidates to the February 24 Supreme Soviet elections.

The programs of the various parties differed on particular issues; on others there was virtual agreement. For instance, all parties, with the exception of the Moscow-loyalist



faction of the Lithuanian Communist Party, support a multi-party democratic system and advocate Lithuanian independence from the Soviet Union. With varying degrees of urgency, all parties also stress the urgent need for legislation to address Lithuania's environmental crisis.

The main features of the programs of the larger and more influential political parties are sketched below.

### *The Communist Parties and Sajudis*

On December 20, 1989, at the extraordinary 20th Congress of the Lithuanian Communist Party (LCP), a resounding majority of the delegates (82.2 percent) rejected Mikhail Gorbachev's repeated pleas for Party unity and voted for independence from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). As a result, there are now two distinct Communist Parties in Lithuania.

### *The Independent Lithuanian Communist Party*

The imminent elections to the Lithuanian parliament were a principal motivation for the December 20 decision. The LCP's extremely poor showing in the March 1989 elections to the USSR Congress of People's Deputies and a November 1989 public opinion poll showing the Communist Party with a mere 16 percent approval rating led realistic Communist leaders to conclude that only a clear break from the discredited CPSU might salvage their chances in the February 24 elections. On December 28, 1989, the newly independent LCP formally registered as a political party within a multi-party system. The break with Moscow paid off -- by early January 1990, public approval of the LCP had climbed to 73 percent. According to Party leader Algirdas Brazauskas, the independents have about 80,000 adherents, most of whom are Lithuanian.

The newly independent LCP declared its intention to strive for Lithuanian sovereignty and put forward its own program, calling for establishment of a social democratic state and renouncing many of the traditional tenets of communism (such as democratic centralism, the incompatibility of party membership and religious observance, and the ideologization of science, culture, education, and information). The independent LCP supports many Sajudis planks and in fact, many LCP members are closely affiliated with Sajudis and vice-versa. Nowhere in the Soviet Union has the cooperation between a communist party leadership and a broad-based nationalist movement been as close as that between the independent LCP and Sajudis.

When pressed for a specific definition of "independence," party spokesmen stress the process of regaining economic and political independence and argue that a "declaration of independence" is not meaningful. They link the success of this process to political, economic and moral preconditions not yet achieved and to the maintenance of good

relations with the Soviet Union and the CPSU. As for ultimate goals, the independent LCP calls for negotiations on Lithuanian independence, but stops short of openly advocating complete secession from the Soviet Union.

The economic plank of the independent LCP platform calls for a transition to a market-based economy which would promote competition, permit all forms of ownership (including private property and hired labor), and incorporate a flexible price and taxation policy.

The independent LCP bases its nationality policy on a November 1989 law passed by the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet which guarantees minorities equal rights. Although explicitly against the formation of national-territorial regions within Lithuania, the LCP professes concern for the education and culture of the national minorities.

### *The Lithuanian Communist Party on the CPSU Platform*

A minority contingent of the former LCP has remained loyal to Moscow. The CPSU Central Committee condemned the independent LCP for splitting off from the all-Union Party organization and has provided both moral and monetary support to the loyalists (LCP-CPSU). According to recently published figures, the LCP-CPSU numbers about 35,000 members of the formerly united LCP.

Although claiming to favor "Lithuania's independence from *diktat*, voluntarism, strong-arm tactics and bureaucratic centralism," the loyalists advocate "an autonomous, socialist and free Lithuanian Republic within a union of such republics." Thus, on the key question of independence, the LCP-CPSU sees Lithuania remaining within a renewed Soviet federation. As regards communist party structure, the LCP-CPSU obviously opposes federalizing the CPSU.

The LCP-CPSU closely follows Moscow's lead on policy and platform and therefore would support Gorbachev's recent call for amending the constitutional guarantee of communist primacy in the political process so that communists would have to earn their place in the political arena by appealing to voters. With respect to the economy, the LCP-CPSU would not be as supportive of a transition to a market economy as the independent LCP and would stress the rights of workers and in particular, their right to be free of exploitation.

On nationality issues, the pro-Moscow LCP calls for greater guarantees for non-Lithuanian -- especially Russian and Polish -- national cultures, specifically for these languages.

### ***Sajudis: The Lithuanian Reform Movement***

Since its formation in mid-1988, the Lithuanian Reform Movement Sajudis has become the most significant political force in Lithuania. Sajudis, whose leadership and adherents include both communists and non-communists, is not a political party, but serves rather as an umbrella organization for the great majority of Lithuania's pro-independence political forces. As for Sajudis' relations with the communists, it "supports the actions of the LCP leadership which might prove useful for the restoration of the Lithuanian state."

Most pro-independence candidates in the February elections ran on a joint platform elaborated by the Sajudis National Assembly. The Commission which finalized the platform on February 3, 1990 included, among others, the heads of the Social Democratic, Christian Democratic and Green Parties, as well as representatives of the independent LCP.

Sajudis explicitly calls for a repeal of all of Lithuania's constitutional obligations to the Soviet Union and the decolonization of Lithuania in accordance with international law. The focus of the platform is the restoration of the independent democratic state of Lithuania and its return to the European and world communities.

The Sajudis plan for the Lithuanian economy, much like that of the independent LCP, calls for the establishment of a market economy and equal rights for all forms of ownership. Sajudis goes further, though, advocating the establishment of a separate system of currency, finance and credit.

The Sajudis election platform concentrates on the promotion of Lithuanian national culture and does not very clearly articulate a policy on national minorities. It does promise, however, to "grant wide cultural autonomy to ethnic minorities and to support them in their efforts to foster their own cultures."

### **Parties and Organizations Under the Sajudis Platform**

The following parties and organizations generally accept the Sajudis platform, with some variation on language and emphasis:

#### ***The Social Democratic Party***

On May 19, 1989, the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (LSDP) was reestablished in Vilnius. First created in 1896, the LSDP continued its activity in exile in the West after it was outlawed by the Soviets. The LSDP was officially registered on January 17, 1990 and now claims approximately 2,000 members.

The LSDP program emphasizes humanitarian values, truth and the value of the individual, declaring that its main objective is the independence of Lithuania and its social and political welfare. This program sounds like that espoused by the independent LCP, but the LSDP leadership asserts that the LCP remains a Bolshevik party.

On the question of independence, newly-elected deputy Kazimieras Antanavicius, chairman of the LSDP and a member of the Sajudis Executive Council, compared the Soviet Union to a ship bound to sink. "We can stay aboard only as long as it serves us well (and certainly not longer than two years), but we must be prepared to jump if the ship goes down."

Believing that an economy must be built which is "worthy of democracy," the LSDP lays out a detailed plan for the future. Based on the state's independence, the plan includes close contacts and trade relations with the West, relying to a certain extent on loans and investments to get Lithuania through the transitional period.

### *The Christian Democratic Party*

Although not yet officially registered, the Lithuanian Christian Democratic Party (LCDP) was formally reestablished at a congress in Kaunas on January 27-28, 1990 and has some 1,500 registered members. First founded in Lithuania in 1905, the LCDP played a vital role in the creation of independent Lithuania. When the Soviet army occupied Lithuania in 1940, the LCDP's activities were discontinued. The program manifesto adopted at the January congress declared the party's principal aim is to reestablish an independent Lithuania in which parliamentary democracy would flourish.

LCDP activists argue that Lithuania can no longer wait for Moscow to free Lithuania and favor a formal declaration of independence as soon as possible. The LCDP program (based on that of the Christian Democratic International) for independent Lithuania stresses individual freedom, private ownership which serves society as a whole, and dialogue with national minorities.

### *The Democratic Party*

At its founding congress on July 29-30, 1989, the Lithuanian Democratic Party (LDP) adopted a program criticizing the Soviet Union for its "imperialist, criminal policy" of continued occupation of Lithuania. The LDP was officially registered along with the independent LCP on December 28, 1989. Although it supports Sajudis' main goals, the LDP is strongly opposed to working with the Communist Party. Jonas Mugevicius, an LDP leader and a candidate to the new parliament, explained that the Communist Party still maintains an unfounded and illegal supremacy in Lithuania. As for regaining independence, the Democratic Party calls for Lithuania immediately to begin operating on

the basis of the independence and equality set forth in the Lithuania-Russia peace treaty of 1920.

The LDP sees independence not as isolation but as a refusal to permit external forces to dictate the country's future. The Democrats see the February 24 elections as an important step towards democracy, but demand that they be followed by an end to the Soviet occupation. Soviet institutions (such as the Supreme Soviet) would then dissolve and a genuine parliament of Lithuania would have to be elected.

Mugevicius asserts that, although economic stability is important to the LDP, current conditions should not prevent the assertion of Lithuanian independence. The economy of a free Lithuania will have to be integrated with those of other countries and a separate Lithuanian currency will have to be created in order to solve economic and societal problems.

### ***The Green Movement and the Green Party***

From within the ranks of the widely supported Lithuanian Green Movement, the Green Party was formed on July 15, 1989 in order to address "green" issues by political means. The Green Party, which has registered 200 members, plans to hold its founding congress in the spring of 1990 (after which it would be eligible for formal registration), but many members of the Green Movement do not plan to enter the official Green Party.

The Green Movement developed the environmental issues plank for the Sajudis election platform. The Greens stress the intermarriage of economic and environmental policy, believing that both can be soundly realized only by a new government within a neutral, demilitarized, and fully independent Lithuania.

"These elections," explained one parliamentary candidate from the Green Movement, "are not for independence, but for changing the system and joining the Western world." The Greens view independence as an instrument to achieve the final goal of a democratic Lithuania in which different nationalities live in harmony.

### **Minority Organizations**

Lithuanians comprise 80 percent of the country's population; the remaining 20 percent includes Russians, Poles, and smaller numbers of Belorussians, Jews, and Ukrainians. Many non-Lithuanians share the goals of the Sajudis platform and do not see Lithuanian independence as a threat to their national cultures. However, the poor economic situation and the destabilized political atmosphere have aggravated tensions between various national groups and the majority Lithuanian population. For many non-Lithuanians, the biggest grievance was a January 1989 law making Lithuanian the only official language. A law on ethnic minorities was passed in November 1989, ensuring the

free promotion of culture and education within minority communities and calling for formation of a council on nationalities in the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet. Apprehension among non-Lithuanians about linguistic discrimination appears to have eased somewhat, but concerns continue to be raised in some quarters.

### *Yedinstvo*

Yedinstvo ("Unity") is an almost exclusively non-Lithuanian organization, which has consistently and vocally resisted the movement toward Lithuanian independence. Valery Ivanov, the head of the movement, was Yedinstvo's only candidate in the February 24 elections. Ivanov ran against another Russian (from the LCP-CPSU, whose members, according to Ivanov, make up about 30 percent of Yedinstvo supporters), and a Sajudis-endorsed member of the Green Movement. Ivanov describes his platform as based on the 1948 UN Declaration of Human Rights and the 1975 Helsinki Accords. He appeals for equal rights for individuals and nationalities (calling attention to the "discriminatory" language law), social defense of workers, and a sovereign Lithuania within a centrally regulated, renewed federation.

### *The Union of Poles*

Although some members of the nearly 300,000-strong Polish minority are involved in Yedinstvo, most are represented by the more moderate Union of Poles in Lithuania. This organization calls for the recognition of Polish as an official language in those districts where Poles constitute a majority of the population, and demands the right to proportional representation in state governmental agencies and in local self-government bodies. Thirty Polish candidates ran for seats in the new parliament.

Jan Sienkiewicz, the head of the Union of Poles and a candidate himself, described his platform as "similar to that of Sajudis," but added that a democratic, independent Lithuania must also be a Lithuania free from nationalism and totalitarianism. He argues that the political and economic risk of isolation dictates caution and he rejects the idea that the West is ready to pick up the pieces if Lithuania takes radical and provocative steps to assert its independence. In the end, he believes that a "compromise" with Gorbachev could be the best plan.

Sienkiewicz expects that a new law will soon be passed to protect the Polish language. In general, he says, the Lithuanians have become more realistic and moderate, and are willing to accept the proposals of the Polish minority. Attempts to create autonomous Polish regions within Lithuania were not warmly greeted (in fact, the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet has on several occasions declared such proclamations unconstitutional and illegal), but Sienkiewicz denies that this remains a key goal of the Poles. He says the proposal succeeded in raising awareness within the Polish population, but the negative reaction from the Lithuanians was, in his opinion, unfortunate. The most

important goal of the Polish population in Lithuania is to have the right to speak and be educated in Polish, and to be comfortable in the land they consider their home.

## **Boycotts**

There are other movements that enjoy substantial political support, but did not field candidates in the Supreme Soviet elections. Radical activists maintain that these elections cannot be truly free and democratic because the Supreme Soviet is an institution imposed on the people of Lithuania by a foreign occupier.

Among these radical groups are both the Lithuanian Freedom League (LFL) and the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), which call for the immediate and unconditional independence of Lithuania. Both groups initially advocated a boycott of the entire election process. Ultimately, however, the LFL did not formally boycott the elections and implicitly endorsed a number of candidates. In fact, one LFL activist registered as a candidate for the LDP in order to mount a propaganda campaign against a candidate from the LCP-CPSU. He then withdrew from the race.

The official CDU boycott was supported by the Lithuanian Helsinki Group, the Young Lithuanians and some members of "Geneva-49" (a draft resistance group based on the 1949 Geneva Conventions, which protect citizens of occupied countries from serving in the army of the occupier).

Although the CDU did not expect to stop the election process all over Lithuania, they were successful in leading a boycott in the district of Snechkus, where there is a 92 percent Russian-speaking population. After a nominated clergyman was transferred to a church in Siberia, the CDU launched a campaign to keep people away from the polls rather than validate an election in which there was only one candidate -- a member of the LCP-CPSU.

## **THE ELECTION LAW AND CAMPAIGNING**

### **Regulations and Procedures**

According to the Lithuanian electoral laws, first published in October 1989, "all citizens of Lithuania, 18 years of age and over, are eligible to vote." The only exceptions are those residents who have been declared incompetent because of mental illness or who are in jail. Candidates must also be citizens of Lithuania and at least 21 years of age.

Whereas previously only organizations of the Communist Party, labor collectives and other public organizations were permitted to nominate candidates, the new electoral law grants this right to various public and political organizations and to citizens' movements

according to their place of employment and residence. Minutes from a nomination meeting attended by at least 250 persons must be submitted to the district (*okrug*) electoral commission along with a statement of candidacy by the nominee. Only upon receipt of these mandatory documents were candidates formally registered and placed on the ballot.

One peculiarity in the procedure is that candidates can be nominated to any district in the country, regardless of where they live. This resulted in the candidacy of many better-educated, urban residents in the more remote parts of the country; more than one-half of the candidates were from Lithuania's three largest cities (Vilnius, Kaunas and Klaipeda). District electoral commissions had the right to deny candidates the right to run in their districts, but had to submit a written justification of their denial. This system resulted in the calculated shifting of many candidates during the registration period. Top LCP candidates, for instance, ran in small towns where they were almost assured victory, and one LDP candidate moved from district to district seeking endorsement from the central Sajudis Council.

Nominations to fill the 141 seats originally totaled 650, but due to violations of the new registration procedures, only 522 of these were formally entered into the race. By election day, there were 472 candidates (including only 28 women) on the final ballots. Among them were 398 Lithuanians, 30 Russians, 30 Poles, six Belorussians, two Jews, and two Ukrainians. The average number of contestants for a given seat was 3.5, with the highest number (8) running in a district within the capital of Vilnius. Eight of the seats were uncontested (there is no requirement that there be more than one candidate for any given seat).

As mandated in the new Lithuanian electoral law, a Republic Electoral Commission was created and invested with complete authority in the organization and implementation of the February 24 elections. This body is made up of representatives from a wide range of organizations, including the Communist Party, Sajudis, the Union of Poles and the Lithuanian Greens.

### **Candidates and Sajudis Endorsement**

At the February 1990 Sajudis pre-election conference, a list of 142 Sajudis-supported candidates (including nine women) was ratified by the assembly. These candidates had been nominated for endorsement by local Sajudis councils in each of the districts. There were four districts where Sajudis did not endorse any candidate, and five where Sajudis candidates ran against each other.

Before the legalization of a multi-party system in Lithuania, pro-independence forces informally agreed that Sajudis would represent them in the nomination procedure and that candidates from these organizations would run on a Sajudis platform. Once they



could formally do so, however, many parties and organizations nominated their own candidates, many of whom did not receive Sajudis endorsement. The LDP, in a defiant move, made an explicit effort to nominate candidates to run against Sajudis-supported LCP candidates. The Kaunas chapter of Sajudis, reputed to be consistently more radical than the Vilnius chapter, made a conscious decision not to support the candidacy of any member of the Communist Party.

Sajudis was the only organization to publish a list of "its" candidates. The breakdown of Sajudis endorsements along party lines was as follows:

<u>Party</u>	<u>Total Candidates</u>	<u>Sajudis Endorsed</u>
No party affiliation	142	94
Independent LCP	205	30
LCP (CPSU platform)	78	0
Social Democratic Party	23	11
Democratic Party	16	3
Green Party	4	2
Christian Democratic Party	2	2
Lithuanian Komsomol	2	0
Total:	472	142

### **Structure of the New Parliament**

Unlike the Soviet parliament in Moscow, in which the Congress of People's Deputies elects a Supreme Soviet, the Lithuanian parliament has only a Supreme Soviet directly elected by the voters. The presidium of the Lithuanian parliament will be elected from within the body, as will the chairman. A proposal to have the president directly elected by the voters has not yet received much attention, but may be debated when the new body assembles. The candidates elected will serve five-year terms as full-time legislators.

Another difference between the new Lithuanian Supreme Soviet and the USSR Congress of People's Deputies is that unlike the latter body, which set aside 750 of the 2,250 seats for representatives of official organizations, all seats in the Lithuanian parliament were determined by direct vote.

### **The Role of Troops**

On January 15, 1990, the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet passed legislation establishing criteria for citizenship at a minimum residency of 10 years, thereby reversing its decisions of September and December 1989 that permitted Soviet troops stationed in Lithuania to take part in the elections. For the first time, Soviet troops who are not citizens of

Lithuania and therefore not eligible to vote, have been disenfranchised in elections to a republic Supreme Soviet.

This new regulation was formulated specifically to address concerns about Soviet military troops voting in large numbers and significantly affecting the outcome of particular races. Other than some Yedinstvo complaints about the rights of Lithuania's "defenders," there was never any significant reaction to the passage of the new regulation, and there were no formal complaints of its violation.

### **Districting**

The Lithuanian Supreme Soviet formerly contained some 350 members. In conjunction with the passage of new electoral laws in October 1989, and in order to cut costs and increase effectiveness, the total number of deputies was more than halved. Under the new system, the voting-age population of 2.6 million was divided into 141 districts of approximately 18,400 voters each. One representative from each of the districts will serve in the new parliament.

The only major complaint about the new districting came from Yedinstvo leader Valery Ivanov. He charged that the districts were formed expressly to break up minority populations and give Lithuanian candidates an advantage in every district. Ivanov also claimed that districting decisions were concealed from the public and that his appeals for information on the procedure were repeatedly ignored.

Polish leader Jan Sienkiewicz did not join in the criticism of districting arrangements. In fact, there were a number of districts where Russians or Poles made up a majority of the electorate.

### **Funding and Access to Media**

Whereas the elections to the previous Lithuanian Supreme Soviet were completely financed on 300,000 rubles, 2.5 million rubles were allocated from the republic budget to finance the February 24 elections (a representative of the electoral commission conceded that "democracy is expensive").

By law, each officially registered candidate received one month of paid leave from work. The state provided printing resources for 350 pamphlets for each candidate and ensured each individual seven minutes of television or radio air time. Beyond that, candidates were left to their own devices and fundraising methods; each candidate could open a campaign account into which donations could be made, but total campaign expenses were not to exceed 1000 rubles. Even the proffered minimal state support was of questionable value; several candidates claimed that they had received their campaign pamphlets only days before the vote.

Many non-communist candidates made it clear that despite this equal minimum opportunity for exposure, Communist Party candidates dominated the campaign scene. Because of their long-entrenched and institutionalized power, they had far more ready access to both the print and visual media. Sajudis candidates, although not as well-resourced as the LCP, also received better exposure than members of smaller organizations.

A general paper shortage hindered printing and presses were not obliged to fulfil the wishes of every candidate. Newspapers could be quite selective and were not bound by law to give equal exposure to all candidates. This practice led candidates to complain that they had no way of defending themselves against political attack. The campaign organizers of one LDP candidate reportedly went on a hunger strike until a newspaper would print a rebuttal to an article which he considered slanderous.

### **Campaigning**

The Western-style art of the political campaign did not make it to Lithuania in time for February 24. The campaign period lasted only one month after candidate registration, and for many candidates campaigning consisted almost wholly of conversations with the voters. In most districts, several all-candidate meetings took place where questions were fielded from a formal panel as well as from a public audience. These meetings often became quite emotional, as in a Vilnius district where a member of the Green Movement ran against the head of Yedinstvo and another Russian candidate. One woman stomped out of the meeting hall when the Yedinstvo candidate refused to admit that Lithuania is an occupied country, and a band of Yedinstvo supporters jeered the Green candidate as soon as he began to speak.

On election day, when Western politicians would have been knocking on doors to get the vote out, candidates to the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet were forbidden by law from campaigning in any form. This regulation was not strictly enforced, and in fact many Sajudis posters remained visible throughout Vilnius. In what was perceived by many as a direct provocation, the LCP newspaper *Tiesa* published a front-page appeal for support of LCP candidates. These violations did not result in any formal charges.

### **Harassment, Intimidation and Complaints**

No formal complaints were registered about the election process leading up to February 24. Several candidates did register informal complaints that could not be confirmed. One would-be Yedinstvo candidate alleged that he had been denied the right to run by a biased electoral commission. There were several reports that collective farm directors were using implicit threats to dictate the voting of their workers. In some districts the LCP-CPSU was accused of handing out scarce goods to influence voters.

Some post-election reports voiced suspicions of KGB "subversionary tactics" against the campaigns of pro-independence candidates. According to these reports, pamphlets were purposely misprinted, mailings were misdirected and candidates were harassed at public meetings.

## **THE BALLOTING AND RESULTS**

### **Voting**

The formalities of the Soviet voting system were basically left unchanged when freer elections began last March. The principle difference is that previously, ballots contained the name of only one candidate. Voters were given the option of crossing the name out, but well-placed "observers" provided a strong disincentive for doing so.

Shortly before February 24, every citizen of Lithuania over 18 years of age was sent an "invitation" to vote. This small slip of paper, which was not required in order to actually vote, informed the recipient of the location at which his or her name would be included on the list of voters. These lists were available for review and amendment up until and including the day of the vote.

On February 24, voters came to one of 2,106 designated polling stations between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. During the course of the day, the Helsinki Commission delegation visited polling stations in three of Vilnius' 21 districts to observe the procedures. At the polling stations, voters could review brief biographies of each candidate before moving on to the balloting room. Each person had to present a passport (which includes a stamp confirming residence) and a signature to receive a ballot. The ballots, 5" x 8" pieces of apparently recycled paper, listed the district's candidates, including their profession and their hometown (but not a party affiliation). To cast a vote, one had to go behind a curtain, cross out all but one of the names, and then emerge and place the paper into the slot at the top of a large wooden box.

All polling stations were manned by officials of the district electoral commission and accredited observers were permitted at all hours. Voter tallies were done by hand; the total turnout for the day was estimated at 70 percent of the 2.6 million registered voters.

### **Counting**

After the polls closed, counting began at each of the polling stations. Election officials then completed an official form and the results were taken to the offices of the district electoral commission, where the tallies from all stations were added up. In order to ensure against fraud, each candidate or party was allowed to send accredited observers to monitor the counting at any or all of the polling stations.

In order for a vote to be considered valid, 50 percent of the eligible voters in a given district had to cast a ballot (voting is no longer mandatory by law) and at least two-thirds of the votes cast must be valid. To win a race, a candidate must receive 50 percent plus one of the votes cast.

## Results

By the morning of February 25, Sajudis had compiled preliminary results (later confirmed as accurate) using reports from observers in each of the districts. Ninety seats were determined in the first round, of which 72 had been endorsed by Sajudis. The breakdown of the 90 winners is as follows:

<u>Party</u>	<u>Total Deputies</u>	<u>Sajudis Deputies</u>
No party affiliation	48	46
Independent LCP	22	13
LCP (CPSU platform)	7	0
Social Democratic Party	9	9
Green Party	2	2
Christian Democratic Party	2	2
Total:	90	72

This total includes 77 Lithuanians, five Poles, three Russians, and one Jew. It also includes almost all members of the Sajudis Executive Council who competed in the election, and all four secretaries of the independent LCP Central Committee.

Run-off elections were originally scheduled for March 10, but almost all local councils responded to a Sajudis appeal to move them up. On March 4, run-off elections were held in 28 districts, and from them 26 more seats were determined, assuring a quorum (116/141) which will allow the new parliament to convene as early as March 10. The breakdown of run-off winners is as follows:

<u>Party</u>	<u>Total Deputies</u>	<u>Sajudis Endorsed</u>
No party affiliation	16	12
Independent LCP	9	4
Democratic Party	1	1
Total:	26	17

Sajudis has thus far won a total of 89 seats and the independent LCP has won 31 (17 of which are backed by Sajudis). The 17 remaining run-off elections will take place from March 7-10.

Because of insufficient voter turnout, new elections will be required in at least eight districts (six from the first round and two from the March 4 run-off). In Snechkus, where the Christian Democratic Union organized a boycott of the first-round elections, only 35 percent of the voters came to the polls. Re-elections are scheduled for April 7.

### **Fraud or Other Complaints**

The implementation of various precautionary measures seemed to assure the majority of the population that these elections would be virtually free from fraud. The most effective of these safeguards was the use of accredited observers at all of the voting stations and during the counting of the ballots.

Although there did seem to be opportunities for fraud -- there was no numbering system for the ballots to monitor their use and the ballot boxes (which were wooden and therefore not transparent) raised some suspicions -- there were no suggestions that any widespread fraud took place. Stories of irregularities included that of a woman who signed for both herself and her son and cast two ballots (this type of voting was permitted in previous Soviet elections) and an unconfirmed report that people came to a voting station outside Vilnius and were told that they had already voted.

## **POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF RESULTS**

### **Legitimized Political Role for Non-Communist Forces**

The Lithuanian elections were the first multi-party elections to a republic Supreme Soviet. Latvia has followed Lithuania's lead in legalizing non-communist parties and Mikhail Gorbachev has called for amending the Soviet constitution's guarantee of the Communist Party's exclusive control of the political process. The ground has thus been prepared throughout the Baltic States and the Soviet Union for the emergence of many political parties and their participation in electoral contests. The Lithuanian experience may serve as an inspiration for regions of the Soviet Union where non-communist political organizations are non-existent or still in their infancy.

### **Impact on Communist Influence Over the Political Process**

The outcome of the Lithuanian elections is not necessarily a model for elections elsewhere, given the strength of pro-independence and anti-communist sentiment among the largely ethnically homogeneous Lithuanians. Nevertheless, the results bode ill for communist domination of legislatures outside the RSFSR (except, possibly, in Central Asia). Communists now face the unprecedented challenge of acting as minority parties within governing coalitions in Supreme Soviets.

The split in the Communist Party before the elections obviated the possibility of a unified communist attempt to control the political process. Judging from the first two rounds, in which the LCP-CPSU won seven seats and the independent LCP -- despite the popularity of its leader Algirdas Brazauskas -- gained only 31, the former are likely to play a minimal role in the new parliament; the latter will exert more sway, but will still be overshadowed by a non-communist majority. Communist influence on the political process in Lithuania will therefore depend largely on the congruence of communist goals with those of the non-communist majority.

### **Moscow's Likely Relations with New Political Forces**

Soviet leaders have abjured the use of force in Lithuania and it seems improbable that Moscow will blatantly try to change or cancel the outcome or will fail to recognize the legitimacy of the newly elected parliament.

The Sajudis victory means that non-communist forces will now attempt to gain control of the executive organs of power as well, including the police, army and internal security services. Moscow can no longer expect communist-dominated political institutions to carry out orders; instead, the Kremlin will have to negotiate with non-communist forces.

Moscow's bargaining power in these negotiations seems limited. Even under the old communist-controlled Supreme Soviet, popular pressure resulted in the passage of many laws based on Sajudis programs; now the pressure will be even greater and will likely focus on more radical goals, including a campaign for realizing Lithuanian independence.

This prospect may lead the Kremlin to speed elaboration of the promised law on secession so as to provide a damage-control framework for a process it no longer appears capable of stopping. But the Lithuanians see themselves as illegally occupied, not as a Soviet republic, and they reject the applicability of secession mechanisms to their situation. In any case, the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet has already declared the primacy of its own laws over Soviet laws and has proved its willingness to defy Moscow in this regard. The Kremlin is unlikely to simply abandon the loyalist Lithuanian Communist Party but the latter's limited influence will force Moscow to deal with the independent LCP (and may well promote factionalist tendencies in other communist parties). Essentially, this will mean dealing with Sajudis, not only because Sajudis will have a majority in the legislature but because of the intermingled membership of Sajudis and the independent Lithuanian Communist Party.

The electoral victory of pro-independence candidates and the related diminution of Moscow's influence on Lithuania's legislature will likely alarm elements of the non-Lithuanian population already concerned by Lithuanian nationalist sentiment. They may now appeal to Moscow for support and, given the need to reassure the large numbers of

Russians and other Soviet citizens living outside their native republics, Moscow will probably try to offer whatever assistance it can.

### **Projected Legislation**

The most important legislative initiative on the agenda is assuring the right to declare independence. This is particularly urgent now that Mikhail Gorbachev is about to acquire much enhanced presidential powers -- including the right to dissolve a republic Supreme Soviet. The Lithuanians (and the other Baltic peoples) have made clear their determination to enter into negotiations with Moscow over the restoration of their independence. In fact, run-off elections originally scheduled for March 10 were moved up to March 4, so that Lithuania can convene its new parliament and present a united pro-independence front when the Soviet Congress of People's Deputies meets on March 12 to endorse Gorbachev's proposals for a presidential system. Newly elected deputies have already formed negotiating teams and Moscow has no easy way of refusing to participate in such talks.

Late reports out of Vilnius indicate that the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet may pass a resolution on independence as early as its first convocation, on March 10-11. If true, future legislative initiatives will depend on Moscow's reaction.

### **Impact on Future Relations Between Moscow and Lithuania**

If Lithuania eventually secedes from the Soviet Union, all Soviet laws governing center-periphery relations will be irrelevant; relations between the Soviet Union and newly independent Lithuania will be regulated by treaty. If, however, Lithuania remains part of the Soviet Union, its relationship with Moscow will have to be drastically reworked. Moscow would have to offer Lithuania a great deal of autonomy to induce it to remain within the federation.

### **Assessment of Democratization**

Democracy in Lithuania is undoubtedly taking root. The newborn multi-party system has passed its first test with the February 24 elections, which allowed voters to challenge and defeat the established communist apparatus. Barring repression by Moscow, the prospects for the consolidation of democratic, representative government appear promising.

Now that the institutions of representative government based on popularity and electoral success have been established in Lithuania, the ground has been prepared for the emergence of Western-style politicians. For now and for the foreseeable future, however, national questions will probably play a key role in determining electoral success.



## **Implications for Washington**

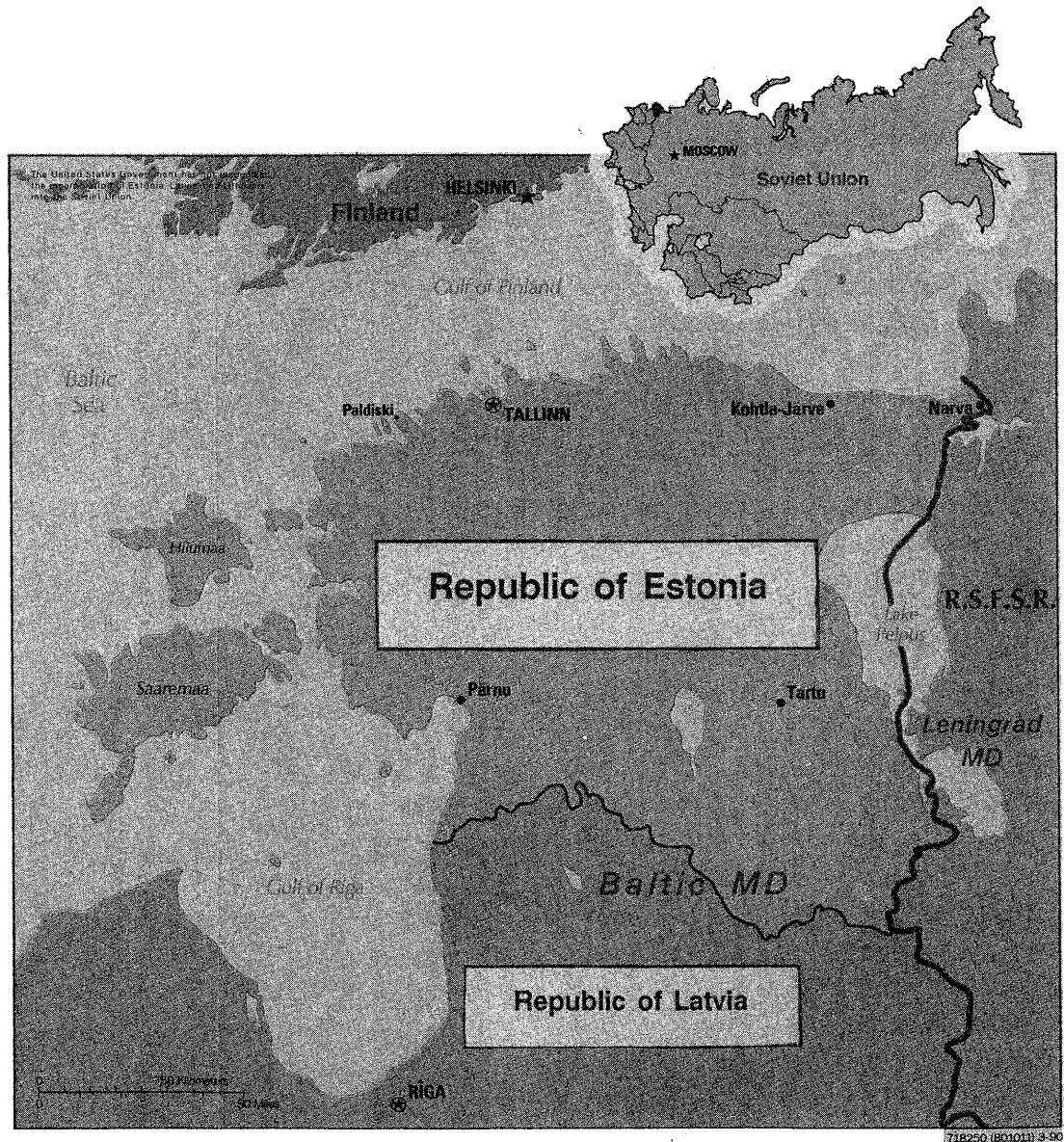
The new situation in Lithuania now confronts Washington with two sets of difficult choices, depending on the course of events. If Lithuania votes to secede from the Soviet Union and appeals for recognition of its independent status to the United States and other CSCE countries on the basis of self-determination, the United States will have to consider its response, knowing that Moscow could consider Western support for Lithuanian independence highly provocative.

Whether or not the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet votes for independence, Washington must decide whether the February 24 elections justify a reconsideration of its decades-old policy of non-recognition. The Supreme Soviet, as well as other institutions imposed on Lithuania after the Soviet occupation, has never been officially recognized by the United States as the rightful representative of the Lithuanian people. Yet, as most of the people of Lithuania consider the elections democratic and representative of the popular will, Washington may be called upon to recognize the legitimacy of the newly elected Lithuanian Supreme Soviet.



# REPORT ON THE MARCH 18, 1990 SUPREME SOVIET ELECTIONS IN ESTONIA

Tallinn, Estonia



April 16, 1990

*This report is based on a Helsinki Commission staff delegation to Estonia from March 15 - 19, 1990. Interviews were conducted with representatives and candidates of many Estonian political movements, including the Communist Party, the Estonian Popular Front, the Social-Democratic Independence Party, the Congress of Estonia, "Free Estonia," the Committee for the Defense of Soviet Power and Civil Rights, and the Greens.*

\* \* \*

## SUMMARY

- The March 18 elections to the Estonian Supreme Soviet were the first since 1940 in which many political groups and parties freely took part. The crucial issue in the election, in which everyone took for granted the participation of non-communist parties, was Estonian independence; the crucial question was whether pro-independence forces would win the two-thirds majority needed to amend the constitution and declare independence.
- The elections produced three broad blocs in the Supreme Soviet: those associated with the pro-independence Estonian Popular Front; the largely Russian anti-independence movements; and a bloc of mostly Communist Party notables who will hold the swing votes. Their position on full Estonian independence, as opposed to autonomy within the USSR, is uncertain, and it remains to be seen how they will vote when push comes to shove.
- A special feature of the Estonian Supreme Soviet elections was the influence of the Congress of Estonia, which held its inaugural meeting a week before, on March 11-12. Conceived as an alternative to the Supreme Soviet, which many Estonians see as illegitimate, this new pro-independence body -- unique both as an institution and for its widespread support among Estonians -- has created a sort of dual-power situation in Estonia and promises to exert continuous pressure for independence.
- Rent by factionalism and on the verge of a formal split, the Estonian Communist Party could not offer voters a clear program reflecting the position of a united party. Its sagging popularity and lack of credibility led it to field only several candidates under the Communist Party banner. Many other well-known communist candidates ran on the platform of "Free Estonia," an election coalition created about six weeks before the Supreme Soviet elections.
- The largely Russian anti-independence forces coalesced into the "Committee for the Defense of Soviet Power and Civil Rights" and ran candidates on a common program. Their members in the Supreme Soviet, together with the four deputies whose seats were set aside for the Soviet armed forces, will constitute a determined minority group strongly opposed to Estonian independence. If they feel the Supreme Soviet is not taking their interests into account, they may choose other means, such as strikes and civil disobedience, to express their discontent.
- The uncertainty about the outcome of Moscow's showdown with Vilnius will impel the Estonians to take a different path than the Lithuanians. Although pro-independence forces in the Estonian Supreme Soviet may have sufficient votes to call for independence, they likely will be more cautious and less declarative, while expressing support for Lithuania and trying to enter into negotiations with Moscow.

## THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

### Introduction

As in Lithuania and Latvia, politics in Estonia revolves around the question of restoring the independence lost when Soviet troops occupied the country in 1940. The widespread support among Estonians for full independence from the Soviet Union has become increasingly evident: by the time of the March 18, 1990 elections to the Estonian Supreme Soviet, virtually all of the Estonian political organizations that have emerged over the last two years openly favored Estonian independence.

This development reflects a political dynamic in which the rise of an organized opposition movement launched an "action-reaction" chain characterized by the progressive radicalization of all the socio-political groups involved. The initial spark was supplied by the growing discontent in Estonia and the greater possibilities for organized political activity, which led to the formation of the Estonian Popular Front (EPF) in mid-1988. The EPF's advocacy of greater autonomy from Moscow and the free expression of Estonian nationalism won it wide backing among Estonians and recognition as the first popular front in the USSR.

The rise of the Popular Front, originally the only tolerated form of opposition to the Communist Party, evoked organized responses on both sides of the political spectrum. At one end were Interfront and the United Council of Labor Collectives, whose largely Russian constituents feared for their status in the new atmosphere of heightened Estonian national feeling. At the other end were more radical, pro-independence Estonian movements, which viewed the Popular Front's initial program of greater autonomy from Moscow as too moderate. These forces eventually formed parties which rejected the legitimacy of Soviet institutions, including the Supreme Soviet, and which propagated the idea of forming an alternative forum based on citizenship in the interwar Estonian Republic. On March 11-12, delegates elected by "Citizens Committees" convened the Congress of Estonia as an alternative to the Estonian Supreme Soviet.

The growing strength of pro-independence sentiment eventually forced the Popular Front to modify its own position in favor of independence, as well as rethink its initially negative position towards the Estonian Congress. These pressures also, in the new era of electoral politics, created deep fissures in the Estonian Communist Party (ECP). Like the surrounding society, it tended to divide along national lines: Estonians have generally backed "independence," though they differed about its meaning, while Russians have generally favored Estonia's remaining within the Soviet Union. The campaign and the results of the March 18 Supreme Soviet elections also broadly reflected this alignment of nationality and politics.

## Political Players

### *The Estonian Communist Party*

The Estonian Communist Party had no clear election platform, since it was disunited and represented various, and often conflicting, views. With membership about evenly divided between Estonians and Russians, ideological differences in the party had surfaced long before March 1990, along with pressures towards factionalism. But unlike the situation in Lithuania, where the Communist Party split into independence-supporters and pro-Moscow loyalists before the Supreme Soviet elections, in Estonia, the Supreme Soviet elections preceded the formal split in the Estonian Communist Party. Consequently, on the key issues of Estonian independence and the independence of the Estonian Communist Party, groups of Estonian communists propagated their own ideas. These generally reflected the positions of political organizations -- such as the Popular Front or Interfront -- with which they were ideologically or nationally aligned, and which had developed clear platforms.

Despite the extremely low popularity ratings of the Estonian Communist Party (opinion polls in December showed the Party hitting a new low of two percent among Estonians and 19 percent among non-Estonians), some of its leaders remain popular and certainly their names are well known in Estonia. Consequently, the ECP's strategy was to have its candidates run as individuals, not as representatives of the Estonian Communist Party. Only a small number of Estonian Communist Party members, such as party leader Vaino Valjas, ran on the Communist Party banner.

Apart from this ECP stratagem, the Party's unpopularity apparently gave rise to another approach to improve its chances: the formation in late January 1990 of "Free Estonia," a new election coalition not nominally communist but in fact representing primarily the reformist Communist Party establishment. Many of Estonia's best known Communist Party figures ran on the "Free Estonia" platform, such as former Ideology Secretary Mikk Titma.

Broadly speaking, "Free Estonia" advocated a democratic political system, an economy based on diversity of forms of ownership, the resolution of nationality problems on the basis of generally recognized human rights and the cooperation of all democratic forces. "Free Estonia" coyly maintained a vague posture on Estonian independence and refused to state whether it saw Estonia's future inside or outside the USSR. Its platform called for realizing the goal of an Estonian republic, but argued the need to develop economic, political and social prerequisites. Given Estonia's dependence on the USSR for fuel, "Free Estonia" warned that rash action would unite Russians in Estonia with "great-power thinking politicians" in Moscow, leading to dire consequences for Estonia.

## *The Estonian Popular Front*

After about a year and a half of serving as an umbrella organization for many political tendencies, the Estonian Popular Front (EPF) now appears to be breaking up into several parties. Nevertheless, for the purpose of the Supreme Soviet elections, it constituted the second of the large and identifiable electoral blocs. Its October 1989 election platform calls for a "gradual transformation of the Estonian SSR into a democratic and independent Estonia," ultimately becoming an independent state in a "demilitarized and neutral Balto-Scandia." Acceptable mechanisms of achieving independence would be a vote by a democratically elected Supreme Soviet or a referendum. Such a referendum would have to be held under international supervision to prevent the presence of Soviet troops in Estonia from influencing the outcome.

The EPF platform advocates political pluralism, an "actual and legally guaranteed multi-party system for all elected bodies of power" and protection for the rights of the opposition. The platform's economic plank propagates a Social Democratic ideology but favors a profit-driven economy, in which all forms of ownership would be equal and private farms would be restored.

On nationality issues, the EPF program demands Soviet acknowledgement of migration as a tool of colonial politics and the elimination of uncontrolled immigration. The Popular Front calls for protecting the socio-economic and political rights of non-Estonians and securing the right of ethnic minorities to cultural autonomy. Participation in the first referendum on Estonian statehood, however, would be limited to Estonians or citizens of the (interwar) Republic of Estonia and their descendants.

Despite this latter emphasis on the priority of citizens of the Estonian Republic, the October 1989 EPF election platform took "a skeptical view" of the Congress of Estonia (see below). Nevertheless, very shortly before the Congress of Estonia convened in March 1990, the EPF modified its position -- presumably impressed by the surging popularity of the Congress -- and came out in support of it.

Popular Front efforts to create a very broad election coalition were not successful; in the end, only four parties ran candidates under the EPF platform: the Peasant Party, the Democratic Labor Party, the Liberal Democratic Party, and the Social Democratic Independence Party. All these parties have their own platforms, which differ on particular nuances, but they put these differences aside for the elections.

## *Other Pro-Independence Parties and Movements*

The upsurge in political activity in Estonia has produced many new pro-independence political parties and movements which participated in the Supreme Soviet election process. Of these, the Union of Labor Collectives of Estonia and the Greens



were particularly important, both in terms of popularity and numbers of candidates who sought their endorsement.

***Union of Labor Collectives of Estonia:*** The Union of Labor Collectives sees the independent statehood of Estonia as the key to addressing all issues of social and economic reform. Its program calls for democratization of power, private property and freedom of enterprise, equal rights for all citizens, and an internationally recognized independent Estonian republic. The Union called on the Estonian Supreme Soviet to request Moscow's recognition of Estonia's *de facto* independence on the basis of the 1920 Treaty of Tartu, and to propose immediate negotiations on implementing the restoration of Estonia's independent statehood. The Estonian Supreme Soviet, according to the Union of Labor Collectives, should be ready to cease its activity and cede its power to the Constituent Assembly of the future Estonian Republic.

***Green Movement:*** There is a broad-based and active Green movement in Estonia, which has also given rise to a more politically oriented Green Party. Many candidates for the Supreme Soviet supported the goals outlined in the election platform of the Green Movement. The Greens advocate an independent, demilitarized Estonia, characterized by a democratic, multi-party system which would respect human rights. Their platform calls for a halt to uncontrolled immigration and the autonomy of minorities without endangering the indigenous population as an ethnic entity. Neither communist nor capitalist, independent Estonia would have a free, farm-based agriculture and an ecologically clean industry based on entrepreneurship.

***Committee for the Defense of Soviet Power and Civil Rights:*** The third large bloc in the March 18 elections, the Committee for the Defense of Soviet Power and Civil Rights is a coalition uniting the largely Russian political organizations in Estonia that arose in opposition to the Estonian national movement: Interfront, the United Council of Labor Collectives, the Union of War Veterans and the Republic Strike Committee.

The Committee's election platform for the Supreme Soviet elections stresses that Estonia must remain part of the "renewed" Soviet federation, in which Soviet laws take precedence over Estonian laws. Any change in that status could only be made by the entire population of Estonia, and only by means of a referendum.

The Committee insists that Estonia's future must be based on socialism in its "Marxist-Leninist understanding" -- socialism "as the path of perestroika." In political terms, the Committee acknowledges the possibility of a multi-party system and advocates the abolition of constitutional guarantees of communist predominance.

The economic section of the Committee's platform reflects the concerns of its constituents: the directors of large enterprises and their mostly Russian-speaking labor force. Though it supports all forms of property which "exclude the exploitation of man

by man," as well as the "illegal activities" of cooperatives and unearned income, it opposes reforms that would lower the living standards of the working class. The Committee backs Estonian economic sovereignty but argues that it can only be realized by maintaining economic ties with other Soviet republics. The platform advocates the independence of enterprises, kolkhozes and sovkhoses (as opposed to their subordination to republic authorities).

The Committee, which represents people who feel the Estonian national movement threatens their rights, calls for the elimination of all forms of national discrimination by the organs of state power, especially in the spheres of work, education, and other social rights. In this connection, it demands a review of all laws passed in Estonia since November 16, 1988 (when Estonia declared sovereignty and claimed that its laws took precedence over laws passed in Moscow) and the annulment of those that limit the rights of civilian and military residents, as well as any laws that contradict the Soviet constitution, the 1948 UN Declaration on Human Rights or the 1966 UN Convention on Civil and Political Rights.

### **The Congress of Estonia**

Alongside all these organizations competing for seats in the Estonian Supreme Soviet -- and complicating both that competition and the overall political situation -- is a body that makes the Estonian political scene unique: the Congress of Estonia. The Congress of Estonia is the product of the Estonian Citizens Committee, an opposition movement established in February 1989 by the Estonian National Independence Party, the Estonian Heritage Society and the Estonian Christian Union. Supporters of the Estonian Citizens Committee argued that as a forcibly annexed, occupied country, the Republic of Estonia continues to exist *de jure* and therefore only citizens of that republic and their descendants have the right to decide Estonia's future. The Citizens Committee rejected Soviet institutions, including the Supreme Soviet, as illegitimate and began a campaign to register individual citizens, as well as those who sought citizenship in a future independent Estonia, with the aim of forming a congress to discuss Estonia's new political order. Over half a million people who had registered as citizens took part in elections to this congress from February 24 to March 1, 1990.

On March 11-12, 1990, the elected delegates convened the Congress of Estonia. The Congress itself is a 499-member alternative parliament, which includes citizens of the Estonian Republic of Russian background. Also included are 35 Estonians of foreign citizenship and 43 observer delegates chosen by non-Estonian aspirants for Estonian citizenship. The delegates elected an 11-member Board and a 78-member "Committee of Estonia" as a standing executive body.

Having declared its right to represent the Republic of Estonia, the Congress passed several resolutions. Calling for the restoration of state authority and its transfer to a

constitutional popular assembly, the Congress demanded that the Soviet Congress of People's Deputies end the illegal annexation of Estonia and withdraw Soviet troops under international supervision. The Congress appealed to the UN, to CSCE signatory states and the European Parliament to consider the issue of restoring Estonia's independence, and also asserted the territorial integrity of the Republic of Estonia based on the 1920 Tartu Treaty. Finally, the Congress of Estonia appointed a delegation to enter into negotiations with Moscow on the restoration of Estonian independence.

Some participants at the Congress urged a boycott of the Supreme Soviet elections, a prospect that greatly alarmed those who feared that the Supreme Soviet could wind up controlled by anti-independence forces. Eventually, however, delegates reached agreement on this issue and the Congress urged its supporters to vote in the March 18 elections.

Nevertheless, the relationship between these two institutions remains unclear and much will depend on the level of cooperation they manage to achieve (see **POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS** below). In any case, Estonia has played a pioneering role by developing the Congress of Estonia. It is the first mass-supported representative body based on a rejection of Soviet institutions which has successfully presented itself as an alternative forum. Without any official status in Moscow's eyes, and lacking instruments to implement its decisions, it has transformed Estonian politics and become a powerful force.

## **THE ELECTION LAW AND CAMPAIGNING**

### **Regulations and Procedures**

The new Estonian election law was the product of negotiations between the electoral commission of the "old" Supreme Soviet and representatives of social organizations, including the Popular Front. Given Estonia's demographic situation, Popular Front experts preferred a proportional, rather than a majoritarian, election. Such elections involve multi-mandate constituencies: each constituency has more than one seat (as opposed to American practice, where majoritarian elections are the rule and winner takes all). According to EPF spokesmen, the Popular Front feared that majoritarian elections would result in an overwhelming defeat for Russian candidates, who, deprived of influence in the Supreme Soviet, might be inclined towards "extra-parliamentary solutions."

Eventually, a "single, transferable vote" system was agreed upon, in which voters label their preferences among the candidates in numerical order, starting with #1. The first round of vote counting establishes the results of voters' first preferences. If the electoral district has more seats than the number of candidates who won on the basis of first preference, voters' ballots would be transferred to their less preferred candidates until the allotted number of seats was filled.

The first draft of the Estonian election law in October 1989 stipulated that candidates must have lived in the Estonian SSR for at least five years. The November 1989 final draft of the election law extended this residence requirement for running for office to ten years.

Another important change in the initial draft of the election law was the stipulation that candidates could only run in the district where they live or work. The "old" Supreme Soviet passed this law under Communist Party pressure, according to Popular Front spokesmen. They charged that the Party's intention was to improve its chances in the countryside, where non-communist movements generally lacked local cells capable of organized political activity.

Official organizations, such as the Estonian Communist Party, and work collectives, as well as legally registered social organizations, such as the Popular Front, could nominate candidates. People could also be nominated by a "citizens' initiative" if they could collect 75 signatures of support.

Candidates in the Supreme Soviet elections did not run on any particular party ticket but rather as individuals, and could be nominated by several groups. For instance, one candidate in Tallinn was nominated by the Estonian Popular Front, the Tallinn Popular Front, the Estonian Writers' Union and the Union of Labor Collectives. It is therefore virtually impossible to offer a clear statistic on how many parties or organizations nominated what number of candidates. But figuring out exactly what a candidate stood for could be even more problematic, since he or she could be nominated by organizations with divergent goals -- as did sometimes happen. Moreover, as Popular Front spokesmen pointed out, not being bound to a particular platform meant that candidates could change their position after being elected. This had happened after the December 10, 1989 local elections, and it remains unclear how this factor will play out in the Supreme Soviet elections.

Territorial election commissions ensured that nominees fulfilled all the requirements for registration and registered them. A total of 474 candidates were ultimately registered as contenders for the Supreme Soviet's 105 seats. A Popular Front spokesman confirmed that all Popular Front nominees were registered. No representatives of any political movements in Estonia complained to Helsinki Commission staff about any problems or complications with the registration process.

All citizens of the Estonian SSR who were 18 years old, except for the mentally ill who were legally declared incompetent and convicted criminals serving their sentences, could vote.

## **Structure of the New Estonian Supreme Soviet**

The Estonian Supreme Soviet has 105 seats, a significant drop compared to the previous Supreme Soviet, which had 284 members. In contrast to the Soviet parliament in Moscow, which consists of a Congress of People's Deputies (one-third of whose seats were reserved for all-union organizations) and a Supreme Soviet (elected by the Congress), the Estonian legislature is comprised only of a Supreme Soviet, all members of which were directly elected for a five-year term.

## **The Role of Troops**

Of the 105 seats in the new Supreme Soviet, four were set aside for representatives of the Soviet armed forces. Troops stationed in Estonia and their family members, regardless of how long they had been in Estonia, elected these four deputies in single-mandate electoral districts formed in military units. A Popular Front spokesman, asked why that particular number of seats was chosen, explained that the Popular Front had not been involved in discussions on this matter, which was "decided" by the authorities.

## **Districting**

In urban areas, the city executive committee drew up electoral districts; in the countryside, the regional executive committee carried out this function. According to EPF spokesmen, the Popular Front played no role in carving up electoral districts, which was done before the December 10 local and city elections (when the EPF made gains). Each electoral district was allocated two seats and, on the basis of population, could be assigned additional seats.

## **Campaigning, Funding and Access to Media**

Once registered, candidates were freed of their job responsibilities and continued to receive their salaries while engaged in campaigning. Candidates could have up to ten proxies to help conduct the election campaign and represent their interests with state and social bodies, voters and electoral commissions. Local electoral constituencies helped set up meetings with voters. Campaigning on election day itself was prohibited, except for previously posted printed materials outside the polling place.

Political parties and organizations could also organize public rallies by petitioning the city executive committee ten days in advance of the planned activity. Helsinki Commission staff heard no complaints about the unwillingness of the authorities to permit rallies.

State funds set aside by the Estonian Electoral Commission covered the expenses of organizing the elections. Candidates' expenses were reimbursed by territorial election

commissions. Individuals and organizations could use up to 5,000 rubles of their own money for campaign purposes.

The Communist Party newspaper published campaign statements by several candidates on a daily basis during the period between candidates' registration and the election, without any apparent bias. Estonian television and radio organized regular question and answer sessions in March for the candidates. Candidates from several districts participated in these exercises, in which each of the candidates answered the same question, as well as questions addressed specifically to him or her by the moderators. Candidates could not make use of electronic media except during these assigned times. Consequently, one candidate who was a television journalist could not appear on his medium except when taking part in debates with other candidates.

### **Complaints**

Popular Front leader Edgar Savisaar complained about the following aspects of the elections, which, he argued, favored the Estonian Communist Party: the four seats automatically assigned to Soviet troops, the ability of candidates to run as individuals instead of on a party ticket, the requirement that candidates run in the district where they live or work, and Communist Party control of the mass media.

Other Popular Front representatives echoed these complaints, focusing on unequal access to the media. They charged that the press, especially the daily press, was under Communist Party control (and no non-communist parties or organizations publish a daily newspaper, though they do release publications on a less frequent -- usually weekly -- basis). As for television, it broadcast daily reports on the actions and speeches of Party leaders. Journalists also received unequal access to Party candidates, with greatest favor shown to those who presented their subjects in a more favorable light. One Popular Front spokesman conceded, however, that the Communist Party could have made greater use of these advantages than it actually did.

The Committee for the Defense of Soviet Power and Civil Rights, on the other hand, railed against alleged Popular Front control of the media. Its spokesmen acknowledged that they had been treated equally in television debates but complained about not having access to the Estonian press. They charged further that typographers in Estonia had refused to deal with them, which forced them to print their campaign posters in Leningrad.

With respect to districting, Committee representatives claimed that electoral districts had been deliberately drawn up so as to keep the Russians from getting one-third of the Supreme Soviet's seats. They also charged that membership of the republic's election commission did not reflect the proportional strength of the Russian population in Estonia.

## **Boycotts**

Forces associated with the current Committee for the Defense of Soviet Power and Civil Rights, such as the United Council of Labor Collectives and Interfront, boycotted the elections to local and city soviets on December 10, 1989, because of their objections to residence restrictions in the electoral law. They reconsidered this approach for elections to the Supreme Soviet and campaigned actively for seats in the legislative body with the capacity to pass laws that could fundamentally affect their interests.

## **THE BALLOTING AND RESULTS**

### **Voting**

Voters came to polling stations with some form of identification (generally a passport), which they presented to election officials who checked the name against a list of voters living in that particular constituency. A voter whose name was not on a list could check with a supervisor who had a supplementary list of names, usually of people whose change of address occurred too close to election date to be registered. Helsinki Commission staff observed a few instances when people whose names were not on either list complained to the supervisor, who obligingly included their names on the supplementary list.

Ballots were distributed to polling stations based on the number of voters in the constituency, plus some extras in case of need. Separate ballots were available in Estonian and Russian. They listed all the candidates and the organizations that had nominated them. In order for a ballot to be valid in the preference system, "#1" had to be marked next to one candidate's name. There appeared to be few instances in the polling station visited by Helsinki Commission staff when voters, who were accustomed to marking ballots with an "x" or crossing out names, misunderstood the instructions (which were broadcast nightly before the elections). Those who needed clarification could ask a supervisor.

People who could not vote because they were ill could send someone to the polling station to inform the supervisor. Two election officials periodically visited such addresses with a small ballot box to collect the votes.

The polling station observed by Helsinki Commission staff contained a booth with curtains, but the curtains remained open, as voters apparently felt no need to deliberate or vote in secret. There was no evidence of intimidation or pressure applied to voters. According to *Komsomolskaya Pravda* (March 23), voter turnout was 78 percent.

## Counting

Vote counting began immediately after 8 p.m. on election day, when polling stations closed. The Estonian Central Electoral Commission made no provision to place people in polling stations to observe the fairness of the initial count. More surprising, perhaps, neither did the Estonian Popular Front. One EPF candidate told Helsinki Commission staff who accompanied him to watch the counting that there were too few people for too many polling stations and that the Popular Front was not a disciplined enough organization to order its supporters to monitor this activity. It was therefore left to those interested enough to do it.

The initial vote counting at each polling station -- all of which was done by hand, with the ballots laid out in separate piles for each of the nominees -- sought to determine the number of "#1" votes for the individual candidates. Subsequent counting operations, which determined voters' choices other than their first preference, were performed in territorial electoral commissions.

## Results

Elections were considered valid if at least half of the voters on the voters' list participated. Because of the complicated nature of the vote transference procedure, it took several days after March 18 to gain a reliable picture of the outcome. *Komsomolskaya Pravda* published the following synthetic results on March 23: the Popular Front and its allies received 49 seats, 29 seats went to the bloc composed of "Free Estonia" and Communist Party, and the Committee for the Defense of Soviet Power (including the four seats reserved for the military) won 27 seats.

Because openly pro-independence forces did not win two-thirds of the seats, they will not be able to make constitutional changes on their own. On the other hand, the anti-independence bloc did not gain enough votes to constitute a one-third minority, which would allow it to thwart unilaterally such changes. Some form of coalition rule is therefore necessary.

## POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF RESULTS

The current standoff between Moscow and Vilnius will obviously play a key role in shaping developments in Estonia and the Kremlin's response to them. Having observed Gorbachev's reaction to specific steps, such as a declaration of independence, both pro- and anti-independence forces at least know what to expect. They can therefore consider various options in determining their strategy and tactics.



## **Legitimized Political Role for Non-Communist Forces**

Unlike Lithuania and Latvia, Estonia did not abolish the constitutional guarantee of the Communist Party's control of the political process before the Supreme Soviet elections. That legal formality, however, did not change the reality of a free multi-party election on March 18. The results of the voting mean that representative government, in which the Communist Party does not automatically control the political process, is now established in Estonia. Only Moscow-orchestrated repression could alter this new reality.

## **Impact on Communist Influence Over the Political Process**

Irreconcilable differences within the Estonian Communist Party finally produced an open break at the March 23-25 Party Congress, when the Party split. Most delegates came out in favor of full Estonian independence and voted to become independent of the CPSU. However, presumably as a gesture towards Moscow and moved to circumspection by the uncertain outcome of ongoing events in Lithuania, they decided to put off implementing this latter decision until after the 28th CPSU Congress in July 1990. A minority group, composed mostly of Russians, refused to go along and formed a pro-Moscow loyalist party. (Initially, yet another faction emerged from the congress but it has since joined the pro-independence group).

The pre-election factionalism and subsequent formal breakup of the Estonian Communist Party ruled out any concerted attempt by the "Communist Party" to run politics in Estonia. Nevertheless, individual Supreme Soviet deputies who remain "communists" will try to influence legislation by forming coalitions with other deputies. In this respect, those who ran and won on the "Free Estonia" platform appear poised to exert significant influence on the parliament's deliberations. Composed mostly of well-known, reform-minded communists, this group of deputies has avoided taking a clear position on full Estonian independence, as opposed to autonomy within the USSR. They may be less inclined to take risks for independence and more susceptible to Moscow's warnings against moving towards independence than other Supreme Soviet deputies. However they lean, the political arithmetic in the Estonian Supreme Soviet will permit them to navigate between the pro- and anti-independence factions. Since they hold the swing votes, they will be subject to enticement -- and pressure -- from both sides.

## **Relations Between the Supreme Soviet and the Congress of Estonia**

The Congress of Estonia and its determined pro-independence stance complicate the political situation in Estonia, which now has two "authoritative" elected institutions. A key question mark is what sort of relationship develops between them. On March 28, the Congress of Estonia handed over its authority temporarily to the Supreme Soviet. Two days later, the Supreme Soviet suspended Soviet authority on Estonian territory, declared the continued juridical existence of the interwar Estonian Republic and

announced the beginning of a transition period to restore it. The Supreme Soviet also stated its readiness to cooperate with the Congress of Estonia, which it recognized as "the representative body of the citizens of the Republic of Estonia" and as "the restorer of state power of the Republic of Estonia."

This marks a surprisingly promising beginning, considering that the Congress sees itself as having legislative initiative and views the Supreme Soviet, which controls the only existing administrative apparatus, in exclusively instrumental terms. Congress of Estonia spokesmen explain that an ongoing campaign to take over this administrative apparatus has now begun and the Congress expects the Supreme Soviet eventually to dissolve itself. In one scenario, it and the Congress of Estonia will jointly organize new elections to a new representative body.

On the other hand, these optimistic forecasts may not materialize. The Estonian Supreme Soviet could become deadlocked in its independence drive, because of the correlation of forces within it, or in the face of severe pressure from Moscow. It may also refuse to cooperate in planting the seeds of its own dissolution. In either case, the Congress of Estonia could reconsider its cooperative stance and an open battle for exclusive political legitimacy may emerge.

#### **Moscow's Likely Relations with New Political Forces**

Moscow's attitude towards the institutions of power in Estonia will depend on two factors: how determined the Soviet leadership is to prevent the restoration of Estonian independence; and whether Estonian political forces try to realize independence over the Kremlin's objections.

Since the Congress of Estonia rejects the legitimacy of Soviet institutions, Moscow will focus its attention on the Supreme Soviet. Unless that body actually declares independence and precipitates a Lithuania-style crisis, Moscow will probably not question its legitimacy or threaten to dissolve it. Rather, it will try to influence its deliberations and decisions. Given the Supreme Soviet's makeup, Moscow has greater chances of success than it had in Lithuania after February 24. So long as the Kremlin opposes Estonian independence, it can count on the cooperation of anti-independence deputies in the Estonian Supreme Soviet. Moscow will use a variety of methods and arguments to pressure the remaining deputies, focusing on the "Free Estonia" bloc.

As for relations with social forces, Moscow's natural allies are the highly mobilized anti-independence group of non-Estonians in Estonia. Some of their representatives told Helsinki Commission staff that if the Estonian Supreme Soviet fails to take account of their concerns, they might resort to strikes and civil disobedience. Soviet behavior in Lithuania indicates that Moscow can be expected to support such actions in Estonia.

## **Projected Legislation**

Before these elections, the "old" Supreme Soviet had already translated into law many demands of the Estonian national movement. In February 1990, it established a commission to negotiate with Moscow about Estonian independence, on the basis of the 1920 Treaty of Tartu between Estonia and Soviet Russia. The restoration of Estonia's independence is the priority item on the agenda of the new Supreme Soviet. Its March 30 resolutions indicate that it can muster votes for strong pro-independence moves. The explosiveness of the issue, however, and the anxiety generated by the Lithuanian experience will likely lead to a different approach, in which the creation of the necessary supportive structures precedes any declaration of independence.

Other important items on the docket include reforming the economic system in the direction of market relations and privatization, taking over the executive organs of power, and addressing the burning issue of Estonians serving in the Soviet armed forces. Economic reform will cause few problems for the Soviet leadership, which may well actively support it, if only to try to divert Estonians' attention from political independence. This does not mean, however, that Moscow will simply acquiesce in Estonia's taking over all-union enterprises in Estonia.

Estonian attempts to gain control of institutions like the KGB are sure to meet opposition from Moscow, and unless the Soviet leadership softens its attitude towards Baltic independence, it is unlikely to agree to exempt Balts from military service. More acceptable compromise options for the Kremlin could be laws on alternative service or agreements to allow Baltic conscripts to serve in the Baltic Military District. Up to now, Moscow has rejected repeated requests by the Baltic national movements for precisely such arrangements.

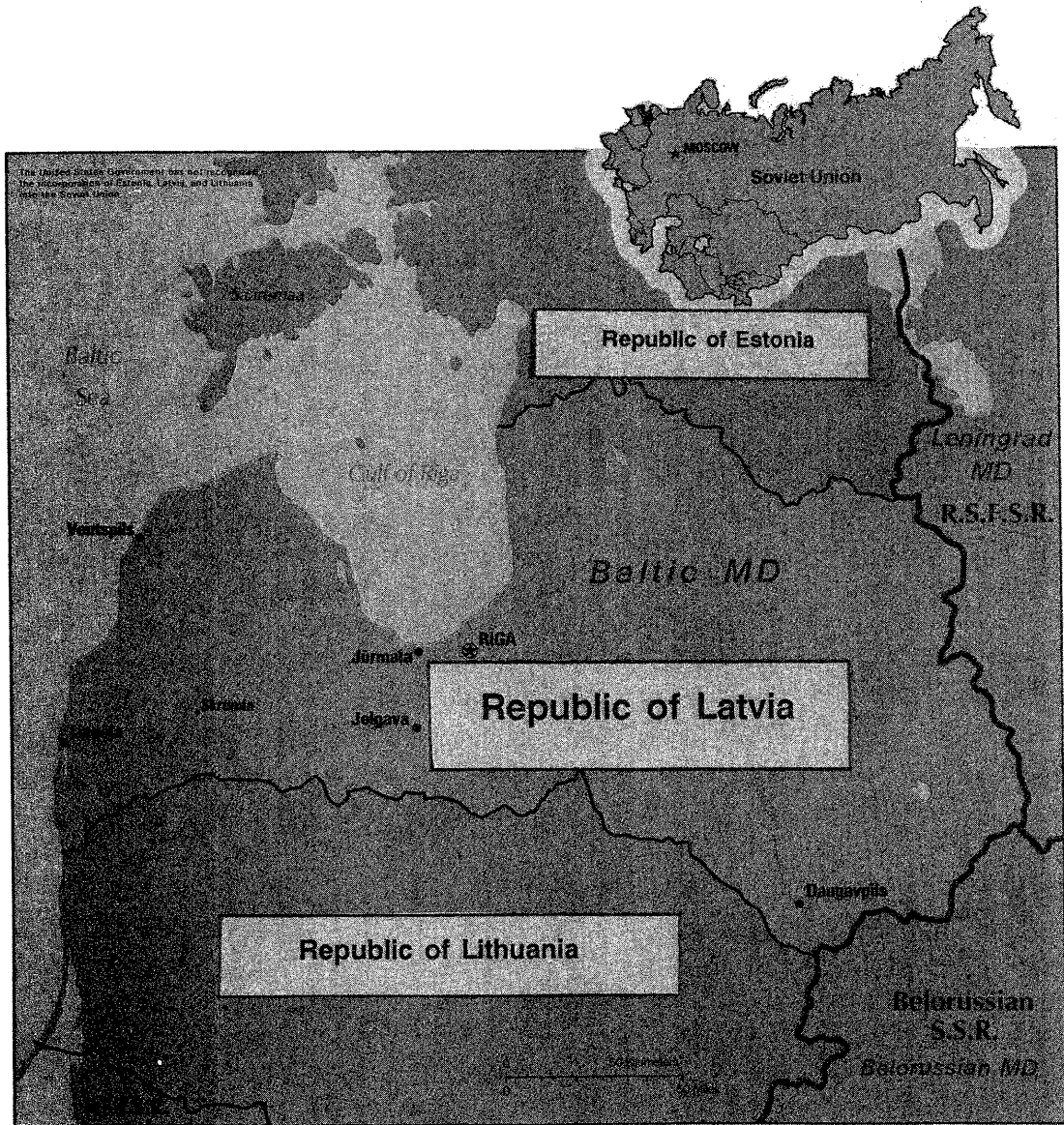
## **Implications for Washington**

The U.S. role in the Baltic crisis thus far has been essentially reactive and it probably will remain so. Certainly Washington will continue to warn Moscow of the consequences of using violence to crush the Baltic independence drive. But if Estonia and Latvia follow the Lithuanian lead and issue declarations of independence, Washington will have to decide whether a united Baltic front warrants a more openly supportive stance on the part of the United States Government.



# REPORT ON THE MARCH 18, 1990 SUPREME SOVIET ELECTIONS IN LATVIA

Riga, Latvia



April 2, 1990

*This report is based on the findings of a Helsinki Commission staff delegation to Riga, Latvia, from March 17 through March 21, 1990. The delegation interviewed representatives of the Latvian Communist Party, the Popular Front of Latvia, Interfront, and various other organizations and minority groups. Officials from district and republic electoral commissions, as well as candidates, their supporters, and the voters at the polls were also interviewed.*

\* \* \*

## SUMMARY

- On March 18, in the first competitive parliamentary elections since 1940, the people of Latvia voted on candidates to the newly restructured Latvian Supreme Soviet. After the first rounds of voting, it remains unclear whether pro-independence forces in the new, 201-seat parliament will have the two-thirds majority they need to amend the current constitution and declare Latvia's independence.
- The Popular Front of Latvia, representing a wide range of pro-independence forces, won 116 of the 170 seats determined in the first round of voting, and an additional five in run-off races on March 25 and April 1. On April 29, new elections will be held in 17 districts where the first round vote was invalid; the Popular Front moved quickly to nominate new candidates in an effort to strengthen the pro-independence faction in the parliament.
- The Latvian Communist Party, since 1940 the sole legal political party in Latvia, is on the verge of fragmenting into at least two factions. As in Lithuania, reform-minded communists have developed a platform calling for a Latvian Communist Party independent of the Soviet Communist Party and for the restoration of Latvian independence. The Popular Front endorsed many "reformed" communist candidates in the March 18 elections.
- Widespread support for full Latvian independence within the indigenous Latvian population diminished distinctions between Communist Party members and non-members in the elections. On the other hand, many of those opposed to Latvian independence were members of the conservative faction of the Communist Party and became allied with the largely Russian "Interfront" movement.
- Interfront's goal in these elections was to gain enough seats to block the pro-independence forces from obtaining a two-thirds majority in the Latvian Supreme Soviet. They have won over 40 seats in the first rounds of voting, but unless they successfully solicit the support of non-affiliated deputies, it does not appear that they will achieve their goal. Nevertheless, they can be expected to undertake measures to impede a declaration of independence.
- Because of the high proportion of non-Latvians in Latvia (about 50 percent), Latvia's drive for autonomy and independence has often lagged behind Lithuania and Estonia. However, the strong showing of pro-independence forces in the elections to the Latvian Supreme Soviet means that Moscow will probably face a similar challenge from all three Baltic states.
- Latvia, along with Lithuania and Estonia, poses challenges to the international community as well. The Baltic states have initiated contacts with East European

countries and are seeking support from Western governments. A key Baltic concern may require a decision fairly soon: whether and how to include them in upcoming CSCE meetings, including a proposed CSCE Summit meeting which may take place in late 1990. Unless the leadership in Moscow has an early change of heart concerning the independence issue, it seems virtually certain that the central leadership will attempt to block their participation.



## THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

### Introduction

As was the case in the neighboring Baltic states of Lithuania and Estonia, the status of Latvia with respect to the Soviet Union was the key issue in the elections to the Latvian Supreme Soviet. Demographic realities, however, make the Latvian situation the most complicated of the three. The population in Latvia is just over 50 percent native Latvian, with 34 percent Russian; the remainder of the population includes Belorussians, Ukrainians, Poles, Lithuanians and Jews. On the surface, support for restoration of the independent statehood Latvia lost to the Soviets in 1940 seems divided along national lines. A recent poll, however, indicated that 53 percent of the Russian-speakers and 96 percent of native Latvians say that they support the idea of full Latvian independence.

Moves in the direction of independence have already been made by the lame-duck legislature. On February 15, 1990, a stormy session of the Latvian Supreme Soviet ended in the adoption (by a vote of 177 to 48) of a declaration condemning the 1940 "request" to enter the Soviet Union and establishing a commission to work for the restoration of political and economic independence, draw up draft treaties and prepare a referendum on these issues. The declaration's ultimate target, however, raises the question of the definition of "independence," as it calls for "Latvia's transformation into a free and independent state within a union of states."

In late December 1989, the Latvian Supreme Soviet followed the lead of the Lithuanians and abolished the Communist Party's monopoly on political power; soon after, a multi-party system was legalized. Since then, as many as 30 parties have sprung up in Latvia, although there is as yet no legal means to register them.

While the make up of the Supreme Soviet is being determined, the Republic of Latvia Citizen's Committee is planning to hold elections in April to a shadow congress which, they contend, will be the true, rightful voice of the Latvian population, the Supreme Soviet being an illegal body imposed by an occupying power. This alternative body would be elected by the over 700,000 people who have reportedly signed petitions indicating their eligibility or desire to become citizens of a restored independent Republic of Latvia. It is unclear how these two congresses would interact if the second one is created.

In the week preceding their parliamentary elections, the Latvian citizenry watched closely as President Gorbachev reacted to the March 11 declaration of independence by the parliament of neighboring Lithuania. Two weeks earlier, pro-independence forces in Lithuania had won a sizable majority of the seats in that state's legislature and, in a direct challenge to Gorbachev, moved quickly to declare Lithuania's independence. Pro-independence activists expressed concern that any measures taken against the Lithuanian

move would alarm the Russians in Latvia and dissuade them from supporting independence-minded candidates in the March 18 vote.

## Political Players

### *The Latvian Communist Party*

Over the course of the past year, there has been a heated debate among communists over the course the Party ought to pursue. As the state's drive for more autonomy moved to calls for the restoration of complete independence, disagreements over stance and policy arose -- largely along national lines. The Communist Party's membership, approximately 175,000 (some 70,000 of whom are Latvian), has declined steadily in conjunction with the rise of democratic movements.

By late February 1990, it had become clear that the Latvian Communist Party (LaCP) was fragmenting. A March 7 extraordinary plenum of the LaCP focused on efforts to maintain party unity. First Secretary Janis Vagris came out against a split, arguing that without unity, the LaCP would never maintain a strong position within the spectrum of political forces in Latvia. Despite such pleas, however, three distinct factions have formed within the party, and many expect a split to be formalized in April, during or after the 25th Congress of the LaCP.

Although some ideas, such as the construction of a humane democratic society, are common to the programs of all factions, there is a significant amount of contention over not only the question of Latvian independence, but also that of the LaCP's relationship with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).

### *The Conservatives*

A January 25, 1990 appeal by the LaCP Central Committee put forth an election platform which reflected the views of the Party's conservative faction. It calls for "the radical reform of the CPSU and an independent and democratic Communist Party of Latvia." Despite this radical language, however, this faction does not understand "independence" to mean that the LaCP should have a different platform and statutes from those of the CPSU.

As for Latvia's independence, the conservative program does not favor secession from the USSR, but rather a democratic and sovereign Latvia within a union of equal republics. The "new society" envisioned by the program is not assured by mutually competitive fronts and parties, but by a "united front in the name of the renewal of Latvia." The LaCP recommends some reorganization of the political power structure, essentially creating a system of checks and balances and calling for the strict enforcement of legal procedures, as well as the realization of the principle of freedom of conscience.

The economic and social planks of the conservatives' program advocate economic reorganization to include diverse forms of ownership, normalization of consumer markets, support for individual and cooperative activities, social guarantees and protection for all classes and nationalities. It also calls for the rehabilitation of the ecological situation and the preservation, development and enrichment of Latvian national culture.

### *The Independents*

On February 24, 1990 more than 1000 delegates from LaCP organizations all over Latvia took concrete steps towards reestablishing the independent LaCP which existed between 1921 and 1940. This preliminary meeting also condemned the 1940 absorption of the LaCP by the CPSU and decided to hold a referendum to gauge support among Party members before holding a founding congress on April 14. Only after this date was set was the Latvian Communist Party Congress moved forward from June to the first week in April. Promoters of Party independence plan to take part in the Congress, but if they do not gain broad support, they will move forward with their own plans.

Leaders in the breakaway faction estimate that some 60,000 communists (mostly Latvians) support the creation of an independent LaCP. The temporary "independent" charter espouses principles of division of power and political coalition, forswearing the ideological unity of the party and its involvement in the organization and management of various societal spheres. It also renounces democratic centralism, thus guaranteeing a true pluralism of parties, minority party rights, and a diversity of platforms and factions to take part in direct elections of delegates at all levels.

As they openly reject the goal of a utopian communist society, the "independents" acknowledge that the name of their restructured party will undoubtedly change. The society for which they strive is based on the principles of social democracy ensuring, *inter alia*, diversity in forms of ownership, private property, a new system of taxation, and a convertible Latvian currency. Calls for immediate agrarian reform and the development of free economic relations in rural areas are also part of the plan to establish Latvian economic self-government.

The goal of the independents' ethnic policy is to achieve full and unhindered rights of ethnic self-determination: "All ethnic groups in Latvia have a right to cultural autonomy and to constitutional protection of rights." The program also guarantees freedom of conscience.

The independents maintain that the first step in achieving all of these goals is ensuring the renewal of the national independence of the Latvian state and achieving international recognition of this status. In contrast to more radical forces, the independence-minded communists do not believe that the fifty years of Soviet power can be overlooked as Latvia moves forward; plans to secure Latvia's independence include

step-by-step negotiations with Moscow and "cooperation with the CPSU and all other communist parties on the basis of parity in the achievement of radical reform."

### *The Third Way*

A third communist faction consists of Party members who favor a more autonomous LaCP than now exists, but not a completely independent LaCP. The "Third Way," or the "Democratic Platform" of the LaCP, arose in response to what organizers saw as an internal polarization that threatened to undo the LaCP entirely. Without ruling out a multi-party system, the Third Way argues that the Party must maintain organizational unity while instituting self-democratization. Given the option of the conservative route, which fails to address the need for change, and the path of the "independents," who plan to move away from a Marxist orientation altogether, leaders of the Third Way estimate that some 60 percent of the current LaCP will quit the Party. It is from this sizeable group of communists that the Third Way counts on receiving strong support. At this point, however, the faction is working from a base of some 100 activists.

The goal of the Third Way is to safeguard the existence of the LaCP by seeking compromise solutions on divisive issues. They reject the concept of democratic centralism and give priority to Latvian decisions over those made by central Soviet authorities. Most essential for society's development are political and economic stability, guaranteed equal rights and freedoms, and high living standards for the republic's entire population regardless of social and national affiliation.

While preferring to remain in a renewed federation, one Third Way advocate conceded that the Latvians should be the ones to make the decision on the state's degree of independence. LaCP status in relation to the CPSU would then be adjusted according to Latvia's relationship with Moscow.

### *The Popular Front of Latvia*

Officially formed in October 1988, the Popular Front of Latvia (PFL) has since become the most powerful democratic organization in the state. The PFL is not a political party but a popular movement with a membership of over 250,000 drawn from various social and ethnic groups and combining communists and non-communists.

The PFL published its election platform on February 14, 1990, proclaiming its foremost goal as the restoration of Latvia's independence. Beyond the legal establishment of Latvia's independence, PFL representatives within the new parliament will seek to assure the development of multi-party democracy which guarantees the equal rights of all political parties and social organizations. Another primary task will be the determination of the status of Soviet armed forces in Latvia and the development of a national army.

The economic plank of the PFL platform is based on the foundations of a market economy and includes provisions for private property, a national monetary system and a new system of taxation. These plans are closely linked to a social program which institutes a minimum wage, a new law on pensions and a price indexing system which allows for cost of living adjustments in wages and pensions.

While condemning attempts to form autonomous national regions within Latvia, the PFL sees as imperative the adoption of laws which would guarantee all national groups the right and opportunity to develop their cultures and to be educated in their own language. In response to minority concerns, upon which opposition groups played during the election campaign, the PFL reiterated its operating principles, which rule out forced expulsion of any segment of society and invite people of all nationalities to unite in efforts to restore Latvian independence. They are also categorically against discrimination on the basis of nationality and call on all interested segments of the population to take part in discussions on proposed legislation.

The PFL ran very successful campaigns for the March 1989 elections to the USSR Congress of People's Deputies and the December 1989 elections to local councils. In preparation for the Supreme Soviet elections, PFL leaders carefully consolidated a unified slate of pro-independence candidates. With the exception of the Agriculture Union (see below), in no case did a pro-independence party or organization put forth a candidate outside of the PFL umbrella and in only a small number of districts were there two PFL candidates running simultaneously. Ivars Godmanis, a PFL leader and election strategist, explained that the success of the coordination effort was largely a result of the deep crisis Latvia is now facing. Small parties and organizations, he explained, have not gained enough trust to run on their own. Godmanis expects that Latvia will work its way out of this social and economic crisis through the development of new laws, and only then will a true multi-party system develop -- complete with regulations on parties.

In mid-January, the PFL published a list of 185 candidate endorsements, all of which had been recommended by local Popular Front branches in regions all over Latvia. These candidates represented the LaCP "independents" as well as members of a number of fledgling parties and political organizations which support Latvian independence and adhere to the basic principles put forth in the PFL platform. Some of the more prominent of these groups are outlined below.

### *The National Independence Movement of Latvia*

The National Independence Movement of Latvia (known by its Latvian acronym LNNK) has, from its beginnings in 1988, made the restoration of the independent Republic of Latvia its paramount goal. Uncompromising and openly anti-communist, the LNNK has garnered widespread popular support (over 11,000 members) and has

successfully pressed the PFL to adopt more radical goals -- in particular its open call for full Latvian independence.

The approach of the elections to the Latvian Supreme Soviet sparked a debate within the ranks of the LNNK over participation in an electoral process which would legitimize what they consider to be the structure of a hostile foreign power. While more radical LNNK members refused altogether to participate in the election process, the majority took part, emphasizing that the newly elected Latvian Supreme Soviet can only be considered a provisional institution during a period of transition. Twenty-three LNNK candidates ran under the PFL banner; the winners hope to form a radical and provocative contingent within the "occupation administration." Closely tied to the Latvian Citizen's Committee, LNNK deputies in the Supreme Soviet also plan to coordinate efforts with the Citizen's Congress once it is established.

### *The Latvian Social Democratic Workers Party*

The Latvian Social Democratic Workers Party (LSDWP), founded in 1905, was the largest party during the period of Latvian independence and continued to function in exile after it was outlawed in the 1940s. In December 1989, the LSDWP was reestablished and that same month several of its members were elected to local councils. In order to appeal to the masses, the party maintains a central line, and includes a faction which defends the rights of the non-indigenous population.

During the founding Congress, Valdis Steins was elected president. In an address to the assembly, he made clear the party's solidarity with the Social Democrats throughout the world, and their opposition to any form of dictatorship or authoritarianism. He also emphasized that Latvian independence is an essential step in overcoming "the economic, cultural, ecological, and spiritual crisis besetting Latvia."

### *The Latvian Green Party*

Environmental activists from several different ecological movements banded together to form the Latvian Green Party (LGP) in January 1990. The estimated 3000 supporters discovered the political nature of environmental protection through their constant work with -- and within -- the public commissions of the State Environmental Committee and local government bodies. They came to the conclusion that efficient and meaningful results could be attained only through the formation of a party, which could then take direct part in the political and economic processes of change. The statutes, action program and manifesto adopted at the LGP founding congress outline a political plan to ensure the survival of mankind -- a path which LGP leaders claim prevents all kinds of speculation of an intellectual or ideological nature. Leaders reject labels of "left" and "right," and describe the LGP as a vanguard party.

### *The Liberal Party of Latvia*

On the principles of the now defunct Latvian Cooperative Political Union, the Liberal Party of Latvia (LPL) was officially founded on January 29, 1990. In the libertarian tradition, the LPL sees the primary duty of state power as protection of personal rights and property. LPL members contend that the economy should be based on the primacy of private property, and that all individuals, given complete freedom and equal rights, must assume responsibility for themselves.

### *Interfront*

The International Front of Latvian Working People, known as "Interfront," was formed in January 1989 and now claims over 300,000 supporters of varied ethnicity -- although the vast majority of their backers come from the approximately 800,000 Russian-speakers in Latvia. The movement's emergence reflects the fears of many non-Latvians that the rise of Latvian national movements will make them second-class citizens and subject to discrimination. A primary cause of concern among them was the May 1989 law making Latvian the official state language. Interfront argues for the primacy of human rights over national rights and cites international human rights agreements in support of its goals.

Cautioning against the restoration of a bourgeois state, Interfront leaders call for a unified Communist Party and a "renewed federation" of equal republics of which Latvia would be a constituent part. Interfront spokesmen also claim that the Popular Front's stated goal of independent statehood reflects the thinking of the intelligentsia and is not shared by all Latvians; in particular, one Interfront leader argued that the rural population does not want Latvia to secede from the Soviet Union. If Latvia should regain its independence, however, Interfront has promoted the idea of Slavic-dominated areas seceding from Latvia and joining either Russia or Belorussia.

The Interfront election platform, published on January 31, 1990, accuses the Popular Front of "seizing power in a parliamentary manner" and effectively brainwashing the populace by monopolizing control of the mass media. The platform also calls for guarantees of workers' rights and self-management of collectives, enterprises and organizations, which it sees threatened by republic economic autonomy.

A week before the elections, Interfront published a list of 70 candidate endorsements in the Riga region and expressed its support for candidates from the Agricultural Union in the countryside. In many single-candidate districts, where the only choice was a PFL supporter, Interfront called for a boycott of the vote. In such cases, flyers were distributed to voters explaining the Interfront goal -- to invalidate the vote because of insufficient turnout, thus requiring new elections for which Interfront candidates could be nominated.

## ***The Agricultural Union***

The Agricultural Union (AU) held its founding congress in the fall of 1989, based on the tenets of the Peasants Union -- one of the most powerful political forces during the years of Latvian independence. The renewed organization was supported by the PFL at its founding. However, a rift between the two movements developed over the Supreme Soviet elections. The AU was put off by PFL attempts to nominate urban candidates into rural areas, and decided to nominate its own candidates (individuals with knowledge of agricultural problems, some of them high-ranking members of the agricultural apparatus), even if it meant running against the Popular Front. This split led to some ambiguity over the position of the Agricultural Union. In particular, the PFL alleged that the AU was representing powerful agricultural chairmen who feared their livelihood was threatened. AU leader Albert Kauls responded, accusing the PFL of bad politics. To further complicate matters, Interfront seized on the split and explicitly endorsed the entire AU slate, whether or not the individual candidates wanted that endorsement.

In the March 14 issue of *Zemlya (Earth)*, the AU published a list of its 45 candidate endorsements. A Union platform appeared in the same issue, along with an appeal making clear that the AU does not oppose the PFL platform and advocates the restoration by parliamentary means of economic and political independence: "Let love for one's land win in these elections, uniting the hope of the peoples of Latvia for a bright future."

In pursuit of this independence, however, the AU stressed the need to take time to create the political and economic preconditions for independence and the importance of taking into account the situation in the countryside and in the agricultural industry. The AU program further calls for radical agrarian reform, equal rights for different forms of ownership and management in the cause of economic effectiveness, independence of production, voluntary self-management at all levels and the right to be master of the final product of one's work.

## ***Minority Organizations***

There are 18 ethnic cultural societies throughout Latvia. Based on proportional representation, a "People's Forum" was elected and met in December 1988 to discuss inter-ethnic issues, national education and other such matters. At the initiative of the People's Forum, the Latvian Supreme Soviet later formed a consultative committee on nationalities to give advice on legislation. Many minority groups advocate formation of a two-chamber parliament, which would include a union of nationalities similar in structure to the People's Forum. For the time being, however, non-Latvians have had to seek representation by other means.



Despite its strength in numbers, the majority of the Russian-speaking population in Latvia has had some trouble finding a place in the emerging democracy. There is no strong, moderate individual or organization behind which to rally, and there is a tendency towards polarized views among the most politically active. Some allege that the PFL, in focusing on national issues, edged out many Russian-speakers interested in working for a democratic society, leaving them with no alternative democratic alliance.

Although Interfront has become the most prominent non-Latvian organization, there are a number of smaller groups within the Russian-speaking population which espouse very different attitudes towards the current issues in Latvian politics. Among these are the Center for Democratic Initiatives, which has had trouble distancing itself from Interfront, and the Democratic Union of Latvia, which represents Russians in support of Latvian independence.

Other organizations include the Latvian Russian Culture Society and the Balto-Slavic Society for Cultural Development and Cooperation which deplore all forms of racism and chauvinism, both from Russians and from the indigenous population in Latvia. Regarding peaceful inter-ethnic relations as vital to a democratic society, these groups call on the USSR Supreme Soviet to consider carefully the inter-ethnic situation in Latvia as well as elsewhere.

Representatives of the Latvian Society of Jewish Culture claim that there is virtually no anti-Semitism in Latvia, and that despite small numbers (around 23,000) the Jewish population has been able to preserve its culture. Grigori Kroupnikov, co-chairman of the Jewish Society and a candidate to the Latvian Supreme Soviet, explained that although his organization does not support the PFL as a body, most of the Society's politically active members support the PFL program.

As part of the PFL strategy for candidate endorsement and fair representation, election organizers approached minority communities (Jews, Poles, Crimean Tatars and others) and told them that they could put forth one candidate in a mutually agreed district, and that candidate would receive the PFL endorsement.<sup>3</sup> This election strategy reflects the particular demographic situation in Latvia; with the exception of Russians, most minority groups have found their political voice through the PFL.

### *Other Groups and Coalitions*

Other parties and organizations include the Latvian Christian Democratic Party, the Latvian Human Rights Defense Group ("Helsinki-86"), and the National Rebirth Party

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<sup>3</sup>Local PFL councils also nominated members of various minorities. There were, for instance, five Jewish candidates at the close of registration.

of Latvia. Various coalitions also formed, including the pro-independence Democratic Bloc and the Pre-election Coalition, an informal union of LaCP leaders and government officials who support a democratic and sovereign state, but stop short of calls for secession, maintaining that Western powers are not magnanimously standing by to usher Latvia into the "common European home."

### **Boycotts**

Other than the selective boycotts called by Interfront in certain single-candidate races, only one significant group entirely refused to take part in the election process: the Republican Party of Latvia (RPL), formed in October 1989 to uphold the pre-war constitution of the Republic of Latvia. The RPL has taken in many radical LNNK members who share the view that elections to a foreign power structure must not be sanctioned.

Although there was some fear that widespread boycotts might stall the convening of the new parliament by depriving it of the two-thirds determined seats needed to meet, in the end there seemed to be no significant effect of such actions.

## **THE ELECTION LAW AND CAMPAIGNING**

### **Regulations and Procedures**

The March 18 elections were organized, administered and overseen by the Latvian Central Electoral Commission, which, according to its head, represents "all strata of the population." Each district of the republic put forward candidates for members of the commission, and the body's final composition was determined by the republic Supreme Soviet.

The Latvian Law on the Elections to the Supreme Soviet, signed on November 11, 1989, states that a Latvian citizen must be 18 years of age to nominate candidates and vote; the only residence requirement is official registration to live on Latvian territory. In order to be a candidate to the parliament, one must be at least 21 and have lived in Latvia for 10 years. The law excludes those certified psychologically ill, those judged "incompetent," and incarcerated criminals from taking part in the electoral process.

The nomination procedure, begun by law two months before the elections, officially ended on February 18. Whereas previously only organizations of the Communist Party, labor collectives and other public organizations were permitted to nominate candidates, the new electoral law grants this right to any public or political organization with a membership of at least 100 persons. Residential communities and military units could also

nominate candidates provided that they could assemble 100 citizens to support the move. City and regional organs could also put forth candidates at their conferences or plenums.

In order to register a candidate, the presidium of a given nomination meeting must present to the district electoral commission a protocol which includes a formal listing of all participants as well as the candidate's declared intent to run. An additional requirement for registration is that at least 500 voters must support a given nominee's candidacy at one or several officially registered meetings. This rather strict stipulation at least partially explains the low number of contestants for the 201 seats -- although some 621 individuals were nominated to run, only 388 were officially registered as candidates. The total included 251 Latvians, 94 Russians, 13 Ukrainians and smaller numbers of Belorussians, Poles and Jews.

There were 49 districts with only one name on the ballot; the maximum number of candidates in any given district was 5. Candidates could run only in one district, but they were not restricted to the region where they live. It was this freedom which allowed the PFL to engineer their list of endorsements so effectively, but it also caused some friction and complaints; the Agricultural Union, for example, protested against the PFL attempts to dispatch a force of urban candidates to the countryside.

### **Structure of the New Parliament**

Unlike the Soviet parliament in Moscow in which the Congress of People's Deputies elects a Supreme Soviet, the Latvian parliament has only a Supreme Soviet directly elected by the voters. In the hope of creating a more effective legislative body, the number of seats in the new parliament has been reduced from 365 to 201. The new parliament can convene at any time after certified election results confirm two-thirds of the deputies (134). At that point, the legislature elects its Chair and the Chair of the Council of Ministers, who in turn proposes a cabinet, subject to ratification by the Latvian Supreme Soviet. Once the cabinet is determined, the Supreme Soviet can begin to write laws which the Council of Ministers is then responsible for implementing.

### **The Role of Troops**

Article 2 of the Latvian Electoral Law states that "soldiers serving on the territory of Latvia may vote or be elected regardless of whether they are citizens of the Latvian SSR or of how long they have served in the Latvian SSR." Soldiers did, however, have to be registered in a particular district in order to vote there. No seats were automatically set aside for representatives of the Soviet Armed Forces (as was the case in Estonia).

Popular Front activists estimate that anywhere from 100,000 to 200,000 Soviet soldiers serve on Latvian territory. The PFL calculated that soldiers and their families could decidedly affect the outcome of the vote in some 16 races. Preliminary results

showed that, in fact, PFL candidates lost in seven of these districts; in one, where 2,000 soldiers cast their ballots, a Polish woman endorsed by the PFL lost by 150 votes. On the other hand, some districts reported that military personnel had voted in favor of PFL candidates.

### **Districting**

Under the new electoral laws, the voting-age population of 1.96 million was divided into 201 districts of approximately 10,000 voters each. One elected representative from each district will serve in the new parliament. In contrast to the reaction to some of the districting decisions made for the local council elections in December 1989, there were no significant complaints about the new districting system for the elections to the Latvian Supreme Soviet.

### **Campaigning, Funding and Access to the Media**

Once formally registered, all candidates to the Latvian Supreme Soviet received one month of paid leave from work and were accorded equal campaigning opportunities by law. The law forbade candidates from using any personal or donated funds for their campaigns and set the limit of spending of government funds for campaigning at 1000 rubles. Government printing facilities and other materials were made available for hire, but candidates were free to use this allotment of money at their own discretion.

Each candidate could formally register as many as ten "trusted persons" to aid in the campaign. These assistants were released from their jobs during the campaign period and were compensated by state funds allocated for the election.

Television and radio stations were required to give equal time to all candidates. In the four weeks preceding the election, Latvian television gave each candidate five minutes of air-time during predesignated Sunday time slots. In general, this regulation was implemented with reasonable effectiveness, although some candidates inevitably received additional exposure. The print media, on the other hand, were not subject to any regulation, and no newspaper seemed to strive for objectivity.

State and public organs were obliged to render assistance to candidates in organizing meetings with electors and getting necessary facilities and materials. The creation of obstacles to voter meetings was punishable by law, but no such violations were formally reported. A number of pre-election rallies took place without incident.

### **Harassment, Intimidation and Complaints**

The most common protest by pro-independence activists was about the right of troops to take part in the elections. They also alleged that Interfront supporters on

district electoral commissions double-registered voters to allow them to cast votes for Interfront candidates in two separate races.

A leader in the Third Way faction of the LaCP also complained that he was not permitted to register as a candidate because he did not fulfill the residence requirement of 10 years. He had been born and raised in Latvia, he explained, but was required to study and work outside Latvia for several years in order to receive his teaching credentials.

In another district, former political prisoner Ints Calitis was informed by the local electoral commission that he could not register as a candidate because his camp term had meant that he had not lived in Latvia for the past 10 years. Because Mr. Calitis had been rehabilitated and absolved of all criminal charges against him, he successfully appealed to the electoral commission and was officially registered only several days before the election (and handily won his race).

Interfront supporters protested that the Russian-speaking population did not receive adequate information on the elections because the Popular Front unfairly dominated the print media. In addition, there were charges that PFL supporters in the television business were able to edit candidate presentations so that they would favor Popular Front candidates. Ironically, some PFL supporters also complained of limited television access.

A number of candidates protested the publication of a list of endorsements in the LaCP newspaper *Sovetskaya Latvia* on March 15. Introduced by a series of goals including "political and economic sovereignty of Soviet Latvia within a renewed federation of the USSR," the list included all non-PFL candidates and implied that they each espoused this conservative platform. In response to many candidates' anger at the unsolicited and undesired endorsement, LaCP First Secretary Vagris claimed to have known nothing about the origin of the list, which appeared unsigned in the paper.

## THE BALLOTING AND RESULTS

### Voting

As election day approached, every eligible voter received an "invitation" to vote. This small slip of paper, which was not required to actually vote, informed the recipient of the location at which his or her name would appear on the list of voters. These lists were available for review and amendment up until and including the day of the elections.

On March 18, the polls opened at 7 a.m. and operated until 8 p.m. During the course of the day, 80.4 percent of the Latvian electorate turned out at local voting stations to cast their ballots. Officials of the district electoral commission presided over the voting

and accredited observers were permitted in the station at all hours. The Helsinki Commission delegation visited seven precincts in Riga to observe voting procedures.

Official candidate biographies were posted at the various polling stations, but most people seemed to have made their decision before arriving. To receive a ballot, each person had to present a passport confirming one's place of residence and then sign by one's name on the list of voters. Upon receipt of the ballot, voters entered a curtained booth and proceeded according to conviction -- in single-candidate races, one either had to cross off the name on the ballot (a "no" vote) or leave it unmarked; in multi-candidate races, either all or all but one name had to be crossed out for the vote to be valid. Once the selection was completed, voters deposited their ballots in a large wooden box.

### **Counting**

After the polls closed, all unused ballots were tallied and invalidated. Electoral commission officials then opened the ballot boxes and the counting began. From each polling station, the district electoral commission required a protocol with the results of the official count, as well as a listing of any complaints filed during the day. In order to ensure against fraud, each candidate or party could send accredited observers to monitor the counting at any or all of the polling stations.

At least 50 percent of the eligible voters in a given district had to cast a ballot in order for the vote to be valid. To win a race, a candidate had to receive 50 percent plus one of the votes cast.

### **Results**

Preliminary results compiled by the PFL and later confirmed by the Central Electoral Commission showed that 170 seats were determined in the first round of voting. Of these, 116 were explicitly endorsed by the Popular Front, 39 by Interfront and six by the Agricultural Union. (The relatively poor showing by the AU was in part attributed to the ambiguities surrounding its campaign.) The PFL claims that these six AU representatives as well as the nine non-affiliated deputies favor Latvian independence.

Popular Front candidates enjoyed strong support in the countryside, but Interfront candidates and conservative communists won many seats in Riga and Daugavpils. In one district of Daugavpils, where Latvians constitute only 12 percent of the population, a PFL candidate won 40 percent of the vote in a race against the city's First Secretary; this and other similar showings were viewed as positive trends by the Popular Front, and seemed to prove that the results of the election could not be divided along national lines.

The Popular Front gained five more seats in run-off elections held on March 25 and April 1, raising the total of explicitly endorsed deputies to 121. Currently, PFL

leaders are concentrating on the re-elections that will take place on April 29 in the 17 districts where insufficient turnout invalidated the vote. In these races, several of the most popular PFL figures have been nominated and are expected to win. These candidates, including PFL President Dainis Ivans, did not run in the first round as many of them are already deputies in the USSR Congress of People's Deputies; there had been a conscious effort by the Popular Front to spread out some of the responsibility and power. As a back-up, however, there had always been a plan to put forth such candidates in the second round to ensure a strong PFL faction in the new parliament.

### **Fraud or Other Complaints**

In advance of election day, the PFL election center prepared a list enumerating the various opportunities for fraud in the Latvian electoral system. The points of potential weakness included the use of mobile ballot boxes for homebound voters and the ballot-box seal in the hands of one person -- either of which could have invited ballot stuffing or even box-switching. The best protection against such deceit was authorized observation during all stages of the counting process. Indeed, the Popular Front and Interfront both seemed well represented at the polling stations, and there were no formal complaints of mischief.

Despite a regulation against election day campaigning, many candidate posters remained in store windows in the capital city. The PFL reported agitation by Interfront activists outside polling stations in two districts, but because the action did not succeed in dissuading voters from supporting PFL candidates, no charges were filed. There were also unconfirmed reports that too many soldiers had voted in one district, and in another, Interfront judges from the local electoral commission apparently walked out when it became obvious that the Popular Front candidate would win.

## **POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESULTS**

### **Projected Action in the New Parliament**

Popular Front leaders have made it clear that, given the victory of pro-independence forces in these elections, the Latvian Supreme Soviet will follow the Lithuanian lead in issuing a declaration of independence and demanding negotiations with Moscow over the restoration of independent Latvian statehood. They will continue to stress the use of peaceful, parliamentary procedures in seeking this goal.

Over the weekend of March 24-25, political leaders from Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania met in Vilnius and discussed the implications of the ongoing standoff between Moscow and Lithuania following the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet's March 11 declaration of independence. Lithuanian President Landsbergis reportedly stressed the need for

support in the form of similar parliamentary declarations from Latvia and Estonia. The Latvian Supreme Soviet is not scheduled to hold its first meeting until May 3, as most of the elected deputies prefer to wait until the April 29 repeat elections have determined all remaining seats. Since a quorum has already been achieved, however, the parliament could convene earlier, and now plans to do so if relations between Moscow and Lithuania should become more strained.

An official Popular Front faction of the new Latvian Supreme Soviet has already formed and includes the majority of the PFL deputies thus far elected. After electing Ivars Godmanis as their leader, members of the group pledged to vote for independence, and discussed tactics for the first parliamentary session. The PFL expects the Latvian legislature to proceed much as the Lithuanian parliament did: upon declaring independence, deputies will adopt the 1922 Latvian Constitution and then immediately suspend or amend any articles that are not adaptable to current conditions.

Beyond the question of independence, one key issue on the Latvian legislative agenda is a law to end service in the Soviet Armed Forces for Latvian youths, who, like Estonian and Lithuanian draftees, have long complained bitterly of abuse and discrimination at the hands of other soldiers. Resistance to the draft has intensified greatly and is a very popular cause in Latvia, one which the new Supreme Soviet cannot fail to address -- especially since the "old" Supreme Soviet had already passed a law on alternative service.

Another likely legislative program will focus on liberalizing laws on the economy, so as to legalize and promote diversity of ownership and facilitate the development of free market forces.

### **Legitimized Political Role for Non-Communist Forces**

As the "old" Latvian Supreme Soviet had abolished the constitutional guarantee of the Communist Party's monopoly on power, the March 18 elections were the first competitive elections for Latvia's highest legislative body. Although a multi-party system has existed *de facto* for some time, no legislation has yet been passed to regulate the formation of political parties. The new Supreme Soviet plans to do so in the near future, which probably will change the Popular Front's umbrella function, as those political movements that ran under its platform crystallize into distinct parties with their own platforms. Whatever happens in this regard, the Communist Party no longer dictates the political process and the legislative agenda.

### **Impact on Communist Influence Over the Political Process**

First round and run-off results showed that more than 100 members of the Latvian Communist Party have won seats in the new parliament. Given the fragmentation of the



LaCP, however, the significance of Party membership has changed dramatically. The independent LaCP even expects to change its name after formalizing its split with the CPSU. Consequently, the nature of "communist" influence over the political process will require redefinition. Politics in the Latvian Supreme Soviet will probably revolve around coalition-forming, especially if the Popular Front disintegrates into its constituent parts.

In the political dynamic of this legislative process, conservative communists and Interfront deputies will unite in an effort to block parliamentary moves towards Latvian independence and initiatives to implement a transition to private property and a market economy. Based on the election results, however, it seems improbable that conservative forces will be in a position to derail moves in these directions. On the other hand, they are certain to protest vociferously when faced with reform legislation.

### **Assessment of Democratization**

The competitive nature of the March 18 elections and the institutionalization of a multi-party system indicate that representative government has arrived in Latvia. While the election procedures grant equal opportunities to all individuals and groups, there is nevertheless a certain amount of disparity left over from the past system. This is compounded by what many described as a lack of political education among voters and uncertainty over their new role in the political future of their country. As one might have expected, voters did not seem to be terribly discerning in their examination of individual candidates, relying instead on reactions to party affiliation.

Many pro-independence activists dispaired of achieving "democracy" as long as soldiers from the Soviet Armed Forces could vote. This issue aside, however, the elections were widely considered a transitional step towards a democratic society, and not an end in and of themselves. More conservative forces voiced concern that what is being passed off as democracy actually amounts to populists breaking apart the old system with no real plan for the future.

### **Relations with Moscow and Washington**

It is likely that, in dealing with the defiant Lithuanian government, Gorbachev will try to establish a precedent that will apply to Latvia and Estonia as well. Elected pro-independence parliamentarians in Latvia have paid close attention to the events unfolding in Lithuania, and, while remaining resolute in their ultimate goal, will no doubt temper their actions slightly in order to avoid open conflict with Moscow.

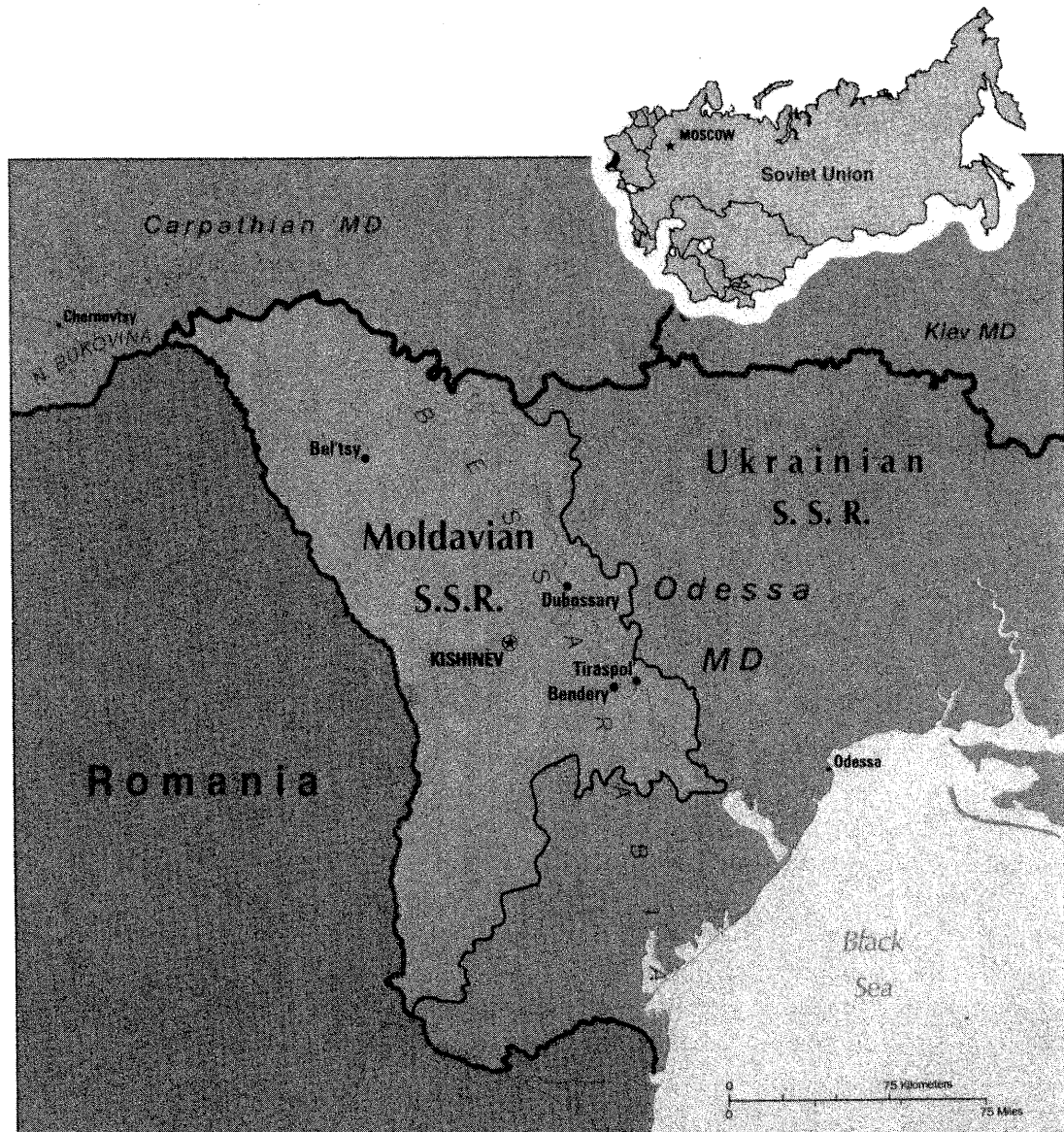
Latvia, along with Lithuania and Estonia, poses challenges to the international community as well. The Baltic states have initiated contacts with East European countries and are attempting to gain backing from Western governments. Popular Front leader Ivars Godmanis asserts that Gorbachev needs to hear U.S. Government support for Baltic

aspirations. He believes such support will bring pressure on Moscow to accede to Latvian independence demands.

A key Baltic concern may require a decision fairly soon: whether and how to include the Baltic States in upcoming CSCE meetings, including the proposed CSCE Summit meeting which may take place later this year. Unless the Soviet leadership has an early change of heart concerning the independence issue, it seems virtually certain that Moscow will attempt to block Baltic participation.

# REPORT ON THE FEBRUARY 25, 1990 SUPREME SOVIET ELECTIONS IN MOLDAVIA

Kishinev, Moldavia



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March 5, 1990

*This report is based on the findings of a Helsinki Commission staff delegation to Kishinev, Moldavia, from February 23 through 27, 1990. The delegation interviewed representatives of the Communist Party, the Moldavian Popular Front, Intermovement, the Green Movement, the Jewish Cultural Association and the embryonic Humanist Movement; officials from local, regional and republic-level electoral commissions; journalists and cultural figures; and candidates, candidates' supporters and voters.*

\* \* \*

## SUMMARY

- The February 25 elections in Moldavia were relatively free for the first time and took place in a relaxed atmosphere, in spite of the rising inter-ethnic tensions of recent months. While these were not multi-party elections, because the legal status of political parties has not been determined in the republic, they did pit supporters of various movements against each other and against Communist Party-supported candidates.
- The Moldavian Popular Front is claiming a 60 percent victory in those races decided on the first round. The Popular Front, the strongest independent political movement in Moldavia, stands for a Moldavian national and cultural renaissance and republic sovereignty in all spheres. Its supporters include Communist Party members and non-Communists alike.
- In Moldavia, where candidates of practically all stripes adopted the vocabulary of reform, the primary issue for voters was not so much reform as nationality policy. The second round of voting, to include run-off candidates in almost two-thirds of the 380 electoral races, will likely feature a starker confrontation between reform-minded supporters of the Moldavian Popular Front on the one hand, and members of the change-averse *apparat* on the other.
- The electoral campaign pointed up the Communist Party's rapid transformation from leading political force to arbiter of political disputes in the republic. The Popular Front set the campaign agenda, and the Party scrambled to adopt part of that agenda as its own while seeking to calm the fears of Moldavia's Russian-based Intermovement.
- If "Sovereignty Now" was every candidate's loud motherhood-and-apple-pie slogan, then "Secession Tomorrow" was the whispered mantra separating the nationalists-by-necessity, like Communist Party First Secretary Petru Lucinschi, from the nationalists-by-conviction of the Moldavian Popular Front.
- Moldavian independence is an attractive, if hazy, goal for many Popular Front activists, who balk at the more popular dream of unification with Romania. They calculate that a Moldavian province under a heavily-centralized Bucharest regime would be no better off than the republic under Moscow's tutelage.
- The possibility of unification with Romania, popular among the Moldavian masses and tour groups from neighboring Iasi, Romania, has hardly broken through the surface of political debate in the republic, but it can be expected to become a hot issue very quickly indeed.

- This prospect alone greatly increases the significance of the Moldavian Supreme Soviet elections. If a democratically elected, Popular Front-dominated body takes up the unification cry of the Moldavian masses -- a cry hardly tempered in some quarters by the uncertain status of Romania's revolution today -- not only will Moscow possibly be faced with demands for border changes, but so will the United States and other CSCE countries that stand for self-determination of peoples.
- Moscow might also feel compelled to respond to the pleas for defense of ethnic minorities in Moldavia, including Russians, who together make up almost 40 percent of the republic's population. Members of these minorities are already alarmed by what they view as an unstoppable nationalist juggernaut starting with last August's establishment of Moldavian as the official language of the republic and ending, perhaps, with the minorities' forced exile.

## THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

The first round of Supreme Soviet elections in the Moldavian republic took place against a background of simmering national tensions which just a few weeks earlier had threatened to derail emerging democratic processes in the republic. With a decades-long reputation as a quiet and placid republic on the surface, Moldavia emerged in the summer and fall of 1989 as one of the hot spots of inter-ethnic conflict in the Soviet Union, rocked by a spiraling series of demonstrations, counter-demonstrations and crippling strikes. In this charged atmosphere, every issue at stake in the elections took on the coloring of the passionate inter-ethnic disputes dominating the polarized Moldavian political scene, and candidates' names, a marker of nationality, were scrutinized as carefully as were their programs.

### The Issues

Approximately 64 percent of the republic's 4.2 million-population is ethnic Moldavian, 14 percent Ukrainian, 13 percent Russian, 3.5 percent Gagauz (Turkic-speaking, Orthodox Christians), two percent Bulgarian and two percent Jewish. The population of Moldavia's cities is heavily mixed (with the Slavic inhabitants of Kishinev, Tiraspol, Bendery, and Rybnitsa ranging from 50 to 85 percent of these cities' populations), while the rural settlements outside the Gagauz-dominated regions of the south are inhabited virtually exclusively by Moldavians. This ethnic mix has defined the issues of the election campaign.

So has the republic's history. Moldavia was one of three principalities claimed as historic Romanian lands. Parts of the territory went back and forth between Romania and Russia in the nineteenth century. The Soviet authorities created an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) of Moldavia in 1924 and, after annexing Bessarabia from Romania in 1940, established Moldavia as a full Union Republic after World War II. Moldavia was subject to severe Russification, as well as purges and other brutal excesses. For many Moldavians, the Russians living in Moldavia today are the unconscious and unwilling personification of the republic's tribulations under Stalin and during the years of "stagnation."

Moldavians speak Romanian, and consider themselves a part of the Romanian political nation. Romania has never reconciled itself to the loss of Moldavia to the Soviet Union, though its government has remained largely silent on this question.

As in other non-Russian republics of the USSR, many people in Moldavia who do not belong to the republic's titular nationality have never learned the language of the titular nationality. The need did not exist until now, as educational and occupational avenues were wide open to Russian-speakers. A combination of coercion and opportunity pushed most Moldavians, in contrast, to learn Russian. The question of language, while

technically settled by passage of a republic law this past August making Moldavian the official language of the republic, preserving Russian as the language of inter-ethnic communication, and providing protection to minority languages, still looms large in Moldavian politics today.

Most Slavic-speakers consider the language law the opening salvo in a Moldavian bid to push them from their jobs and ultimately from the republic itself. In fact, they dominate high-level positions in the republic out of all proportion to their numbers, furthering the legacy of intense Russification of the republic over five decades. Many Moldavians, on the other hand, detect an "imperialist mentality" among Russians and other Slavs in the republic who have never bothered to learn Moldavian or otherwise act in any way other than as conqueror or colonizer. Moldavians ask, at a minimum, that Slavs recognize the sovereignty of the Moldavian republic and see their place as in, rather than above, that republic, and that Slavs no longer be given preferential treatment in jobs and education. Slavs ask that they not be personally subject to punishment for 50 years of Russification of the republic either through personnel purges or violence. At the extremes, vocal and altogether visible in Kishinev as in other Moldavian cities, Moldavians call for all "outsiders" -- whether they arrived two or 200 years ago -- to leave the republic immediately, while Slavs call for strengthening the police state to protect them from future angry mobs. Sumgait and Baku and Dushanbe intrude often into conversations with Russians and Jews in Moldavia, while the specter of rising nationalism in the Russian republic casts long shadows over any attempt to build protections for the Russian minority into the Moldavian political structure.

Aside from inter-ethnic conflict, many Kishinev voters interviewed identified economic problems as the most vital electoral issue. A low standard of living and newly-acknowledged unemployment among Moldavians, combined with continuing (if recently slowed) in-migration by Russians and members of other ethnic groups, have only exacerbated inter-ethnic tensions. As Moldavian workers are released from agricultural work, they cannot get jobs or housing in the cities. Numerous Moldavians complained of the discrepancy between their years-long wait for apartments and the ability of incoming Russian workers to find housing within six months of coming to work in the huge, Moscow-directed industrial enterprises as a further insult.

Other voters placed the greatest emphasis on the environmental disaster taking place in Moldavia. They pointed to the excessive use of pesticides which, according to Green Movement calculations, have poisoned some 95 percent of Moldavia's arable land and virtually all of its freshwater sources. They also objected to the irresponsible pollution by the huge industries in Moldavia -- again dwelling on the tie between those factories and the republic's Russian inhabitants.



As to other themes dominating this campaign, a survey of the election platforms of the 10 candidates competing in Kishinev's Lenin *rayon* reflected widespread concern over reform of the republic's medical system, establishment of the rule of law, and reducing bureaucracy. These issues surfaced in almost all the platforms, regardless of where the candidates stood on the political spectrum.

All of these issues have been magnified by the wave of national feelings sweeping through the Moldavian population. In an atmosphere where few specifics find their way into print and voters are altogether too dependent on rumors and innuendo, a cycle of reaction and over-reaction has created an argument of the deaf among members of the national groups and among the more uncompromising supporters of the various national movements.

The movements until now have been able to ride the nationalist wave in a bid to consolidate political strength, but whether they will be able to control popular feeling before it bursts through the channels carved out by Party and state remains an open question. Some look to the new Supreme Soviet to calm tensions and carry inter-ethnic dialogue from the streets to a high political level. Yet as of the end of February, after a divisive election campaign, few candidates or voters interviewed in Kishinev felt that the Supreme Soviet could master, much less become the arbiter of, the emotional inter-ethnic struggle over Moldavia's present and future.

## THE PLAYERS

### The Moldavian Communist Party and Its Program

The Moldavian Communist Party went into the February 25 elections with stronger popular support than it has enjoyed in decades. In November, the Party replaced its First Secretary, Semen Grossu, with Petru Lucinschi (Petr Luchinsky, in Russian) after demonstrations earlier in the month, which had blocked the military parade in Kishinev, led to a mob attack on the republic Interior Ministry building and brought troops of the USSR Interior Ministry into the Moldavian capital. The Moldavian Popular Front (MPF) had been campaigning against Grossu, the last republic Party chief holdover from the Brezhnev era, and other members of his apparatus, for almost one year. Grossu had termed the MPF "extremist" and "hooligan," refused any dialogue with it, and responded to complaints of discrimination against ethnic Moldavians with hostility. Lucinschi, in contrast, has taken many opportunities to express his willingness to work with all "constructive forces" in Moldavia. While Lucinschi's ascension to power has not led to a great turnover in the Party apparatus ranks, voters interviewed in Kishinev suggested that his conciliatory statements and favorable press coverage have won the Party some time, if not out-and-out trust.

Lucinschi's speech before the February 1990 CPSU Central Committee plenum announced his electoral platform writ large. Noting that "Moldavia [had] occupied a record place in terms of preserving stagnation under the conditions of perestroika," and that many Party members were turning in their party cards in reaction, he expressed a clear recognition that the Party would have to answer popular demands to win some respect. Therefore, he identified republic sovereignty as the first priority in Moldavia, tempering this call with a proposal at the plenum for a reinvigorated "union of sovereign states on the basis of a new union treaty.... requir[ing] a clear definition of the range of problems which the republics will delegate to the center the right to resolve." Cognizant of the political power of such movements as the Moldavian Popular Front, Lucinschi also proposed convening a roundtable of all movements in the country to encourage dialogue and, presumably, to keep the Party one step ahead of the independent movements.

In an interview with Helsinki Commission staff two days after the election, Lucinschi presented the Communist Party as the only viable political force which could overcome the ethnic divide in Moldavia. Voicing respect for many MPF goals, he said that the greatest difference between the Popular Front and the Party was in their varying conceptions of the tempo of change in the republic. The first ethnic Moldavian to take the helm of the republic Party, Lucinschi agreed that the cadres dominated until now by Slavic-speakers should be replaced gradually with a more representative ethnic mix. No one should be forced out of his or her job, he suggested; instead, incoming personnel should be subject to uniform hiring requirements. One of those requirements would be a sound knowledge of the Moldavian language. The rights of minorities would be enforced not only by affirmation of their cultural autonomy, as the MPF platform provides, but also by incorporating human rights language from international documents into the republic and union constitutions.

On the subject of republic sovereignty, Lucinschi predicted that Moldavia would be well on its way to realizing this goal already within a year. By January 1, 1991, 90 percent of the production of Moldavian enterprises is to be under control of the republic. Genuine sovereignty would make secession unnecessary, he said.

A realist above all, Lucinschi confirmed that he had not run his electoral campaign on a "Party platform," but instead on his own credentials. Whether the Moldavian Communist Party will survive intact into the 1990s is uncertain, but Lucinschi seems sure to weather upcoming political storms.

### **Non-Communist Movements and Their Programs**

Aside from the Moldavian Communist Party, three movements dominate political discussion in the republic: the Moldavian Popular Front, the *Unitatya-Yedinstvo* International Movement for the Defense of Perestroika (Intermovement), and the Green Movement, *Actiunya verde*. Other smaller or emerging political movements include the

Gagauz Khalky People's Movement, the Moldavian Democratic Movement for Restructuring, the Committee for Democracy and the Independence of Moldavia, the Moldavian Peasants Union, the Kishinev Humanist Club, and the League of Democratic Youth. New cultural associations which may take on a greater political role in the future include the Bulgarian *Vozrozhdeniye* Social and Cultural Friendship Society and the Jewish Cultural Association.

### ***The Moldavian Popular Front***

The Moldavian Popular Front, the leading independent political force in the republic with from 700,000 to one million claimed supporters, was founded in May 1989 as an umbrella over nine groups, and was granted legal recognition in October 1989 after struggling with resistant republic authorities. The MPF derived much of its democratic tradition from the Moldavian Democratic Movement, but as it has turned to more overtly nationalist aspirations it has lost the strong inter-ethnic cooperation that characterized the earlier movement.

MPF Vice President and candidate Yuri Rosca identified passage of a new constitution defining the status of the Moldavian republic and its relationship to Moscow, and the rapid creation of democratic structures in the territory, as the MPF's top legislative priorities. He explained that these legalistic goals were not, however, the planks in the MPF platform which found the most resonancy among voters. Instead, he said, Moldavians felt that for the first time they had a chance to participate in a national renaissance, and they did not want to lose that chance because of the disapproval of either the Communist Party or the minorities. The MPF platform stood apart from others, Rosca pointed out, by its commitment to fulfilling the needs of Moldavians beyond the republic's borders, and by its determination to reunite three historically Moldavian regions in today's Ukraine with the republic.

The MPF's pre-election program published in Moldavian newspapers included republic sovereignty over resources, republic citizenship, political pluralism, designation of the republic as a demilitarized zone, support for Moldavians beyond the republic's frontiers, the right to establish diplomatic relations with other countries, a mixed economy, strengthened rights of ownership and inheritance, freedom of religion, cultural autonomy for minorities, the abolition of the *nomenklatura*'s privileges, punishment for environmental crimes, a ban on the use of pesticides and a reorganization of the medical system.

The Popular Front has indicated that it would reserve the right to leave the Soviet Union "if mandated by popular will and in accordance with the stipulations of the constitution." While unification with Romania is not a priority at present, many in the Popular Front see it as a realizable goal in the future.

### *Unitatya-Yedinstvo Movement (Intermovement)*

The *Unitatya-Yedinstvo* International Movement for the Defense of Perestroika (Intermovement), composed mainly of ethnic Russians and Ukrainians, began to take shape in January 1989. As Intermovement Presidium member Vladimir Solonar explained, the new movement grew out of the realization that if minority groups did not press their own demands, their rights might be violated. Intermovement went to battle with the Moldavian Popular Front over the language law, pressing for Russian as well as Moldavian to be an official language of the republic, and did win a compromise. In spite of its affirmation of perestroika, it has evolved into a conservative party that stands for a return to law and order, and the establishment of political stability. To this end, it wants to see the republic government put a stop to nationalist, particularly Moldavian-nationalist, agitation.

Gauging the political strength of Intermovement is difficult. Moldavians and some Slavs and Jews see it as merely a small force that can make a lot of noise. The movement has, however, picked up substantial support from minority members who look to it for their protection as individuals and as members of national minorities in the republic. Thus, like the Moldavian Popular Front, Intermovement represents a wide spectrum of views on goals and tactics. While its more moderate members see its aim as "realizing perestroika without nationalist excesses," the movement supported last August's industrial strikes in majority-Slavic cities, as well as this past January's referendum in favor of the majority-Russian city of Tiraspol gaining autonomy within the republic. That referendum followed on a Gagauz declaration of autonomy last November, which the Moldavian Supreme Soviet rejected as unconstitutional. (While the MPF platform calls for guarantees of cultural autonomy for minorities, minorities such as the Gagauz call for administrative autonomy as well.) The complaints of Intermovement representatives that the financial outlays necessary to change the language and alphabet on signs and official forms will overburden the Moldavian economy sound to Moldavians like a hypocritical, belated and, most of all, artificial concern over the economic situation. Such obstructionist actions and isolationist attitudes have convinced the Moldavian Popular Front that Intermovement is not so much a rival in the political ring as a potential gravedigger for Moldavian national aspirations.

The Intermovement pre-election platform included a call for a two-chamber Supreme Soviet, composed of a Council of the Republic and a Council of Nationalities, to ensure protection of minority rights; creation of a Constitutional Oversight Committee, composed of representatives of all nationalities; support for the CPSU's nationalities program; and a mixed economy. Intermovement's socio-economic priorities in the areas of housing, the medical system and the environment, appear to be similar to those of the Popular Front.

### *The Green Movement (Actiunya verde, or AV)*

The Moldavian Green Movement grew out of ecological sections in such organizations as the Moldavian Journalists' Union, which established an ecological section in 1983. In February 1989, initiators of the movement attempted to hold a founding conference in Kishinev, but the conference site was surrounded by nervous militia and the conference organizers kept the proceedings low-key in order to avoid a confrontation. By late October 1989, when authorities finally permitted the Moldavian Greens to convene a full-fledged founding convention, the movement was already a political force to be reckoned with.

The Green Movement arose out of a growing consciousness among Moldavians that their republic was the most polluted in the Soviet Union after, perhaps, Uzbekistan with its cotton monoculture. The Greens have been spreading the message that Moldavia is the most densely populated Soviet republic, with a population of 130 per square kilometer, and that it has the least amount of potable water and forest land, and most overworked and poisoned soil. Against this background they look with horror on continued immigration (officers and miners who have served in the North and far East of the country have a right to move where they choose, and many are choosing Moldavia), new road-building and settlements, and widely applied agricultural methods encouraging further erosion of the rich *chernozem* soil. In the new Moldavian political context in which, as AV President Gheorghe Malarciuc points out, "Everyone suddenly finds he is a believer in God and an environmentalist," the Greens see themselves as the only movement worthy to wear the environmentalist mantle.

The Greens also appear to be the only mass-based, inter-ethnic movement in Moldavia. Aside from the tiny (14-strong at this point), embryonic Humanist Club, AV is the only political force which is indeed supported equally by members of all the republic's ethnic groups. As such, it could serve as an integrating force, as the Moldavian Communist Party seeks to do. More likely, it, too, will be forced to choose sides as the rival national groups demand its allegiance. It is far more likely to gravitate to the Moldavian Popular Front, with its emphasis on republic sovereignty over economic and environmental matters, than to Intermovement, with its plank of control of defense, foreign policy, transport, communications and "law and order" from Moscow.

The Greens' pre-electoral platform, published in their newspaper *Nature*, called for environmental impact statements to be required for any projected development in Moldavia, official and unofficial environmental monitoring, subjugation of the government environmental committee to the Supreme Soviet rather than the republic Council of Ministers, and transformation of Moldavia into a demilitarized zone. Further, the platform called on Moldavian voters to cast their ballots against any representatives of the "techno-bureaucratic nomenklatura, the direct authors and originators of the region's ecological crisis."

## THE ELECTION LAW AND CAMPAIGNING

The Moldavian Supreme Soviet published its draft law on elections in mid-September 1989 and passed the final version on November 23. The greatest changes in the final version were in the minimum number of labor collective members necessary to get a candidate onto the ballot (which was decreased from 200 to 100) and in the removal of the right of social organizations to put forward their own supra-territorial candidates.

### Right to Vote, Nominate Candidates and Campaign

The Moldavian election law establishes that residents of the republic 18 years and older shall enjoy the right to vote. The only exceptions are those residents who have been declared incompetent because of mental illness, or who are in jail. Residents must be at least 21 years old to compete in elections.

Candidates for each of Moldavia's 380 electoral districts are nominated by labor collectives, collectives of secondary and higher-level students, *rayon*, city and *rayon-in-city* organs of social organizations located in the corresponding district, and assemblies of voters in their place of residence, assemblies of authorized representatives of kolkhozes, and military servicemen in their military units. Labor collectives with no fewer than 100 workers can also put forward candidates, as can meetings of 300 or more voters in their place of residence, called by no fewer than 50 voters. More than half the gathered voters at such meetings must vote in favor of nominating the candidate. The district electoral commission must be informed of the nominating meeting at least three days before it is to take place.

The minimum numbers of voters necessary to nominate candidates has provoked criticism from all political quarters. Moldavian Popular Front candidate Yuri Rosca complained that with this requirement, all intelligentsia-dominated enterprises -- newspapers, clinics, and museums, for example -- faced higher barriers to nominating their own candidates than other enterprises. Rosca pointed out that while the law provides that enterprises can join forces, it is not so easy for them to back candidates jointly. Many candidates and voters pointed up the difficulty of getting 300 residents of a district together at one time.

Both Moldavian Communist Party First Secretary Petru Lucinschi and Intermovement candidate Vladimir Solonar suggested in separate interviews that every candidate should be able to collect the signatures of a certain percentage of voters in a district to obtain the right to be nominated. Lucinschi felt that the different minimum requirements for social organizations, enterprises and residential communities was only leading to unnecessary tension between different forces and interest groups in Moldavian society.

Of the 1,828 candidates competing in the February 25 Moldavian Supreme Soviet election, about 340 were endorsed by the Moldavian Popular Front and 33 by the Green Movement. (It is not known how many were endorsed by Intermovement.) Well over 80 percent of the candidates were Communist Party members. *Izvestiya* reported on February 27 that only four percent of the candidates were from the working class. Among the candidates were: 883 directors, chairmen, and managers; about 300 other "leading figures" (doctors, engineers, agronomists, deputy directors, party secretaries); 70 writers, journalists and artists; 15 military men; 15 priests; and 12 cooperative owners. *Izvestiya* commented wryly that this new body would be "not so much a parliament as a party-managerial *aktiv*." Moldavian publicist and Green Movement member Gheorge Malarciuc agreed, noting ruefully, "At the very time when the CPSU plenum is renouncing the leading role of the Party, Moldavia is creating a one-party parliament."

### **Role Set Aside for Organizations and Troops**

The draft election law had included provisions for social organizations to put up their own candidates in addition to those nominated to represent the district where their residence or workplace was located. These provisions were removed from the final version of the law.

According to the election law, members of the military have the same right to vote as other residents of Moldavia. This provision of the electoral law led to numerous complaints from the Moldavian Popular Front. Some MPF supporters felt that a citizenship law setting out minimum residence requirements should be passed in the Moldavian Supreme Soviet and that the electoral law be amended to apply only to citizens of the republic. Two Kishinev-based Ukrainian soldiers interviewed by Helsinki Commission staff said that they preferred to be able to exercise their vote in the district where they were based, even if they would be stationed there only for one more year. They felt it important to add their voices to those who would "put a stop to criminality" in the republic.

### **Districting**

For the first time, according to M.V. Apopiy, Secretary of the Central Election Commission for Electing Moldavian SSR People's Deputies, the electoral districts were drawn not according to the total number of residents, but according to the number of eligible voters. Each of the 380 electoral districts in Moldavia was to have on average 7,800 constituents. In practice, the size of the districts, announced on November 29 (five days after the elections were scheduled, as required by the law on elections), ranged from about 6,000 to 11,000 voters.

Moldavian Popular Front supporters felt that some of the districting initially had been drawn to allow Gagauz and Russian candidates an unfair advantage. Specifically, they pointed to the smaller number of voters in some districts where these minorities were concentrated. Some district boundaries were modified on appeal, and substantial complaints about districting did not surface at the time of elections.

Some members of the Jewish community favored creating a special Jewish electoral district in the future where Jews from various electoral districts could vote to ensure election of a deputy who could represent Jewish interests.

The election law contains a provision for electoral commissions to collect absentee ballots from voters who expect not to be in their region during the elections; commission delegations also make house calls with voting boxes to homebound voters in their districts on the day of elections. Such calls are not, however, made on hospital patients, some of whom are far from their rural homes. One candidate's representatives complained to the Central Electoral Commission on election day that some 550 patients who were admitted to hospitals in one Kishinev electoral district after February 10, the deadline for registering voters, were deprived of the opportunity to vote either in their residential electoral district or the hospital's district. The representatives of another candidate running in a district including psychiatric hospitals complained that a block of psychiatric patients had been allowed to vote in the district, in spite of the fact that they seemed unfit. (The electoral law provides that psychiatric patients certified by a competent court as fit do have the right to vote.) The veracity of these complaints could not be confirmed; a uniformly applied system of distributing and collecting absentee ballots would obviate such complaints in the future.

### **Access to Media and Funding**

The election law states, "Moldavian SSR candidate people's deputies from the time of their nomination are guaranteed equal rights to speak at pre-election and other meetings, conferences, sessions, and in the press and on television and radio."

For weeks before the elections, candidates had two-minute spots on television to publicize their positions, and some were featured in a few televised roundtable discussions. Far from all the candidates, however, had an opportunity to appear on television. Candidates already holding prominent positions in the Moldavian Communist Party and Government predictably had far more extensive media coverage than others. As far as can be determined, no effort was made to give competing candidates matching time or the right of reply.

By far the most complaints concerning access to media came from Intermovement candidates. They claimed that they could not express their views through the official press, which rejected Intermovement announcements and other information as attempts to incite



nationalist feelings. Nor do they have their own information organs, such as the Moldavian Popular Front's *Desteptarea* and *Glasul* or the Green Movement's *Nature*, or organs that supported their platforms, as the Writers' Union newspaper *Literatura si Arta* supported the Popular Front.

Technically, only state-provided resources can be used in the pre-election campaign; funding from other resources is expressly prohibited in the election law. An official at the Central Election Commission admitted, however, that this provision was only honored in the breach. While the election commissions were charged with printing posters featuring candidates' photographs and programs, some candidates had their own printed. (They may have worried that otherwise the job would not be done; the posters for local soviet candidates apparently were not printed by the time of the elections.) Some candidates were widely rumored to be taking advantage of the resources available through their workplaces. Others were left with few resources on which they could draw. The Popular Front, for example, had a single telephone in its Kishinev campaign headquarters.

### **Campaign Rallies and Literature**

The election commissions were responsible for organizing meetings between candidates and voters. In one district visited by Helsinki Commission staff, such meetings were said to have taken place every day for the month before the elections, although some of the smaller meetings appear to have been organized by the candidates themselves.

In addition to these meetings, candidates and their appointed representatives met individually with voters. Some voters reported that virtually every candidate or candidate's representative in their district showed up in their apartment during the week before the elections to discuss voter concerns. While candidates were allowed to have five appointed representatives who would be compensated for their lost salaries while they campaigned, they could have in addition an unlimited number of voluntary representatives. The candidates in Kishinev, at least, seemed to take advantage gladly of representatives both before and during the elections.

In an attempt to establish some stability in the republic, the Moldavian Supreme Soviet decided in a January 31 emergency session to declare a moratorium on political activities likely to exacerbate national tensions. The moratorium seemed aimed more at the almost weekly, unsanctioned demonstrations in Moldavia's larger cities than at campaign rallies. Few voters or candidates interviewed in Kishinev felt that the moratorium had interfered seriously with the campaign, in large part because it had not been enforced.

One major pre-election rally took place on February 11, when a crowd variously reported between 50,000 and 300,000 gathered in Kishinev to press for autonomy for the republic. The rally was jointly sponsored by the MPF and the Moldavian Communist

Party. MPF supporters had requested that the rally be broadcast live, but it was shown on television only afterwards. They complained that many speeches, including that of MPF candidate Yuri Rosca, were cut out of the program, and that the list of MPF-backed candidates read out at the rally was deliberately excised from the broadcast.

## Complaints

Some Moldavian Popular Front representatives voiced a general complaint that an atmosphere of fear and dependency still reigned in outlying rural areas, and that they expected that rural voters consequently would be more likely to vote for kolkhoz chairmen and other local officials who could control the supply of products, building of roads, etc. They claimed that in one race, voters were intimidated and even beaten during the week before the election at the instigation of a kolkhoz chairman-candidate. This charge could not be confirmed independently.

Otherwise, candidates and their representatives complained less of outright harassment than of delays and obstructionism by election commission officials. Even the head of the Moldavian Communist Party Central Committee Department for Work with the Soviets and Public Organizations, N.F. Arnautu, complained in a newspaper interview,

"From the first day of the campaign, which opened on December 27, the Chisinau [Kishinev] authorities enrolled their candidates using local collectives which they surveyed, thus preventing, in many cases, the enrollment of popular candidates. While the candidate who is put up by a local collective or a company only needs a vote of 100 raised hands in a public meeting (which is thus controlled by company managers or the local leaders) the other candidates, including popular candidates not supported by institutions, must gather 301 voters in a meeting place in order to be enrolled....In this way, the collectives and companies...continue to exert pressure on the population to prevent them from naming popular candidates."

One Popular Front candidate running in a Kishinev district chronicled her two frustrated attempts to get registered before succeeding on her third try. No representative of the district electoral commission came to the first nominating meeting, in spite of the fact that the commission had been notified the requisite three days before the meeting was to take place. A commission representative telephoned to say that he would be present at the second meeting called to nominate the candidate, but he did not show. Finally, the candidate was able to be registered on the final day of the registration period.

The Green Movement encountered a delay of over two months to register as a legal organization as the Moldavian Council of Ministers sat on the application and then announced that the movement's charter required modifications. It was legalized finally in

the first week of February, almost one and a half weeks after the candidate nomination period had closed. Thus it could only endorse candidates *ex post facto*.

All of these complaints and more could be referred to the Central Electoral Commission where, in the days up to, including and after election day, a beribboned but beleaguered war veteran took complaints from candidates, their representatives and voters. If the complaints could not be answered satisfactorily -- and the angry exchanges overheard in the complaint bureau suggested they could not -- they were to be registered with the Commission in the hope of avoiding similar problems in future elections.

## THE BALLOTING AND RESULTS

### Procedures

The Helsinki Commission staff delegation visited four out of five polling places in District 9 of Kishinev's Lenin *rayon* on election day. Each polling place was equipped with two red ballot boxes and three or four voting booths. Two smaller ballot boxes stood by for electoral commission representatives' house calls on homebound voters.

The electoral commission in each locality sealed the ballot boxes at about 6:45 a.m. after each commission member had verified that the boxes were empty. The polls opened promptly at 7:00 with popular music blaring out of loudspeakers to attract voters. (District 9 featured the "Lambada" as its opening number.) Aside from the music, the polling places were easily identifiable by large, colorful signs.

Voters entered the polling place, presented their passports and had their names crossed off the voting register, received the ballots for republic, regional and local Soviets, and stood in line waiting for a booth. On each ballot, voters were required to cross out the names of all candidates except the one for which they were casting their vote. Booths were curtained on the two open sides for privacy, although some voters requiring help reading and marking the ballots were permitted to vote in pairs. They deposited their ballots in the boxes placed on the other side of the voting booths.

Each polling place was staffed by an electoral commission composed of five to fifteen members nominated by labor and student collectives, kolkhoz assemblies, local social organizations, and "organs for independent social activity of the population," such as the various political movements. In addition, each candidate could choose to be represented at the polling places by "trusted figures" who could verify that the voting was taking place in a free and fair manner. The activities of the "trusted figures" observed by Helsinki Commission staff varied widely: at some polling places, these representatives stood outside the rooms where voting was taking place; at others, they conscientiously

patrolled the premises and reportedly prevented a few attempts to cast more than one ballot.

### **Counting**

The polls closed promptly at 8:00 p.m., and the polling places were locked up. Members of the electoral commissions, "trusted figures" and journalists had the right to be present during counting. First, the commission would count the number of unused ballots and the number of voters crossed off the register to determine the number of people who took part in the election. Then the commission determined the number of invalid ballots, such as those on which a voter had left more than one candidate's name. (In the Lenin district of Kishinev, 1,828 of 52,346 ballots cast were declared invalid for this reason.) Finally, the votes were counted candidate by candidate. Each member of the commission signed the statement of election results, and commission representatives brought the statement to the commission at the next highest administrative level. Thus, the statements made their way from the polling places through the local and regional commissions to the Central Electoral Commission.

### **Results**

At 4:00 p.m. on Tuesday, February 27, 44 hours after the polls had closed, Vladimir Kiktenko, the Chairman of the Moldavian Central Election Commission, disclosed preliminary election results at a press conference in the Supreme Soviet building in Kishinev. (By law, the Electoral Commission has 10 days to make the election results known.)

83.5 percent of Moldavia's approximately 2.8 million eligible voters participated in the elections. Of the 1,892 candidates, 140 deputies were voted in, two candidates in each of 237 districts are to run in a second round of voting on March 10, and new elections will be held in two months' time in three districts where the requisite 50 percent of registered voters did not show. Of the 140 deputies voted into the Supreme Soviet, 65 percent are ethnic Moldavian, 15 percent Russian, almost 13 percent Ukrainian, five percent Gagauz and two percent Bulgarian; over 80 percent are Communist Party members.

Because candidates did not run on specific party or movement tickets, but rather were endorsed less formally by parties and movements, it is difficult to determine exactly how many seats each political party or movement won. According to their own tallying, the Moldavian Popular Front won a 60 percent majority of the 140 seats decided on the first round, and got candidates into virtually all the run-off elections. The most prominent representatives of the Moldavian Communist Party, republic First Secretary Petru Lucinschi and Supreme Soviet President Mircea Snegur, each won an easy victory in their respective districts.

## POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE ELECTIONS

The February 25 elections confirmed that the non-communist movements in Moldavia, especially the Moldavian Popular Front, enjoy strong polling power. Moreover, as the Moldavian Communist Party has demonstrated by adopting the vocabulary and much of the agenda of the MPF and the Green Party, these movements have quickly taken on a mantle of legitimacy as they have become the voiceboxes of Moldavian aspirations. The Party has already moved from playing a leading role in society to arbitrating between competing political and social forces. If it does not succeed in this role, it could be reduced quickly to merely a brake on the independents' forward march.

While the Party is attempting to remain above the fray, coopting some independent party goals and mediating the independents' arguments, its members already are deeply engaged in political battle. The lines between Party and independent movement affiliations are blurred and, in the eyes of many, irrelevant. More important at present, say the voters, is the divide between the Moldavian Popular Front and the local bosses: the enterprise managers, kolkhoz chairmen and Party secretaries who are up against the Popular Front in virtually every one of the 240 second-round races, according to MPF candidate Yuri Rosca. Until the Supreme Soviet passes a law on political parties, candidates and voters alike will be able to wear as many political cloaks as suits them.

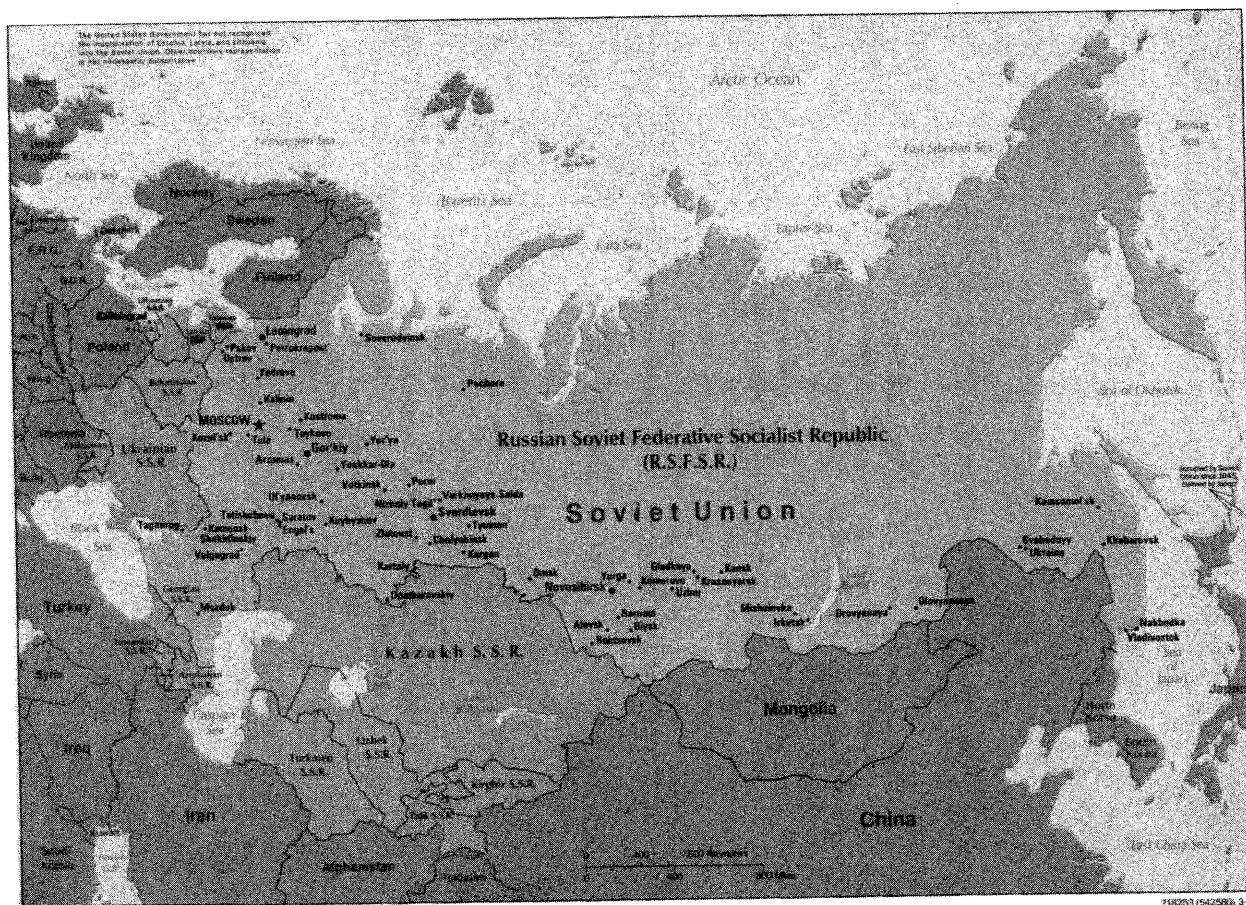
Most MPF, Intermovement and Communist Party candidates chose not to include their movement affiliations in the platforms posted at the polling stations. One MPF candidate competing in a heavily mixed neighborhood in Kishinev said that she thought it wise not to alienate Russian and Ukrainian voters with such a clear statement of where she stood on the political spectrum. For this reason, many platforms sounded very similar. According to candidates and voters alike, the real battle lines were drawn neither in campaign posters or newspaper articles, but at rallies and meetings with the voters. Printed and verifiable information about the candidates carried less weight, in the end, than second- and third-hand reporting of what they had said. New laws allowing equal access to the press likewise would help sort out the differences between political movements, which many voters regarded as altogether unclear.

The election campaign pointed up the necessity for every movement vying for power in the republic to develop a program for sovereignty, the minimum popular demand in Moldavia. It is as yet unclear whether the Communist Party regards sovereignty as a sufficient platform to head off popular pressure for secession, as Lucinschi suggests these days, or rather as a first step toward separating ultimately from the union. Whether Moscow has to deal directly with a Popular Front-dominated Moldavian Supreme Soviet, or work through Party First Secretary Lucinschi is irrelevant, for it will be faced almost immediately with a demand to make good on the republic's demand for sovereignty.



# REPORT ON THE MARCH 4, 1990 CONGRESS OF PEOPLE'S DEPUTIES ELECTIONS IN THE RUSSIAN REPUBLIC

Moscow and Krasnodar, RSFSR



March 28, 1990

*This report was compiled on the basis of personal observations and voter interviews at polling places in Krasnodar, RSFSR, interviews with candidates, political activists, Party and election officials in Moscow and Krasnodar, Western and Soviet newspaper reporting, Radio Liberty Research Reports, and Helsinki Watch: "On the Eve of the Elections, February 1990."*

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## SUMMARY

- The March 1990 elections to the Congress of People's Deputies of the Russian Republic demonstrated the continuing strength -- or ability to manipulate the political process -- of the Communist Party apparatus in large areas of the RSFSR. Nevertheless, a comparatively small but impressive list of reform and opposition candidates was elected in several urban areas.
- When the final results were tallied, *Sovietskaya Rossiya* reported that 1,026 of the 1,068 seats had been filled; 86 percent of the new RSFSR People's Deputies were Communist Party members. A large number of regional Party secretaries were elected. The Party itself, however, is factionalized and fatigued, and membership per se will not mean lockstep unity on issues facing deputies.
- Among the winners identified with the "reform ticket" were former political prisoner and Moscow Helsinki Group member Sergei Kovalev, and Father Gleb Yakunin, an Orthodox priest who was released from internal exile in March 1987.
- Also elected were *Argumenty i fakty* editor and Gorbachev nemesis, Vladislav Starkov, Russian Orthodox lay activist, journalist and businessman, Viktor Aksyuchitz, and outspoken reform economist Tatyana Koryagina. Reformers took around 80 percent of the seats in Leningrad.
- Boris Yeltsin won his seat in Sverdlovsk on the first round. However, the presence of a large bloc of Party regulars will probably doom his prospects for being elected Chairman of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet.
- The election and the campaign leading up to it featured numerous charges of election law violations, irregularities, and "dirty tricks." Some violations were inspired by the manipulative Party *apparatus*, although other campaign shenanigans reflected the more universal desire to get elected, one way or another. Both candidates and election officials complained of irregularities. Charges include illegal manipulation of the nomination process, malfeasance and obstructionism on the part of election commissions, ballot box stuffing, and lack of access to the vote counting process.
- The impact of these electoral irregularities on the elections is difficult to determine. Eventually, the Soviet press reported that 2,230,439 ballots were declared invalid, out of an approximately 180 million potential ballots for territorial and national-territorial districts. At least one district race will have to be contested anew, and complaints of election law violations in seventeen other districts are scheduled for investigation.

- Certain common issues ran through the campaign: 1) the poor state of the economy and social services; 2) the catastrophic state of the environment and the ruination of historic Russian lands; 3) a preoccupation with Russia's alleged disadvantaged position vis-a-vis other republics in terms of allocation of resources; 4) loss of moral values and the resulting social cost; and 5) establishment of social justice and general dissatisfaction with the "powers that be."
- President Gorbachev's policies received little direct attention, as all the actors and actresses nominally support democratization and perestroika. The "Patriotic Front" bloc criticized reform elements in Party leadership for allowing "distortions" of perestroika and allegedly weakening the economic and political power of the USSR.
- Other than the Communist Party, political parties per se were technically illegal in the Soviet Union at the time of the elections. However, several "pre-election blocs" were established to endorse and work for groups of candidates. In the long run, the contests seemed to come down to the "democrats" versus the "national patriotic forces" versus "the Party/trade union *apparat*," although as election day approached, the distinction between the latter two became blurred.
- Because of limited media access and legal restrictions on independent campaign financing, many voters were not familiar with the positions of their candidates, relying in some cases on the rumor mill, or taking their cues from the brief descriptions of the candidates on the ballot itself.
- For all the discontent against the Party apparatus and active campaigning by reformers, the average voter tended toward cynicism and fatalism. Several voters said they had been more enthusiastic over last year's elections to the USSR Congress of People's Deputies, but "all they do in Moscow is talk, and nothing gets done" so they did not expect much to come out of the RSFSR Congress.
- The presence of an opposition bloc should have an invigorating impact on the political landscape in the RSFSR, but the ability of reformers to muckrake should not be overemphasized. As peoples' representatives, they will also be expected by their constituents to address specific, day-to-day issues such as housing, health, and economic progress. Also, there will be ethnic/territorial issues within the RSFSR to face. But as legislatures in other republics stake out their own agendas, the influence of Russia within the USSR will undoubtedly become much more important than it had been in the pre-Gorbachev era.

## **RUSSIAN SOVIET FEDERATIVE SOCIALIST REPUBLIC**

The Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) is by far the largest republic within the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, stretching from Kalingrad *Oblast* on the Baltic Sea to the Bering Straits between Siberia and Alaska. It encompasses over 17 million square kilometers of territory, divided into 86 major administrative areas (not necessarily mutually exclusive) and many more smaller administrative areas pertaining to cities, rural and city districts. It is a multi-national territory; the majority of the 143 million-strong population is Russian (82 percent).

### **RSFSR CONGRESS OF PEOPLE'S DEPUTIES**

The RSFSR Congress of People's Deputies elected in 1990 will differ slightly from its counterparts in other Soviet Republics. Unlike the latter, RSFSR voters choose legislators from a "national-territorial" district and a legislator (hereafter referred to as "deputy") from a "territorial" district. There are 900 territorial districts and 168 national-territorial districts in the republic. These districts overlap one another; consequently, the voter chooses two candidates, one from the territorial district, and one from the national-territorial district.

The RSFSR Congress is also unique in that deputies will subsequently choose a smaller, standing RSFSR Supreme Soviet, as is the practice in the USSR Congress of People's Deputies. In other republics, voters choose their republic Supreme Soviet directly.

### **THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE**

Many non-Russians in the Soviet Union consider Russians colonialists, benefactors of a system that promotes the Russian language, and, insofar as Moscow tolerates any religious practice, the subtle patron of a docile and KGB-infiltrated Russian Orthodox Church at the expense of other faiths. Traditionally, Soviet Communist dogma has presented the Russian people as the unifying force that brought together the grateful nations and nationalities that presently comprise the Soviet Union. ("The Russian nation played an outstanding role in the solution of the nationality question," Mikhail Gorbachev, Perestroika, 1987.)

Many Russians themselves feel that they have been victimized as much, if not more, by the Bolshevik Revolution. While some Russians have benefitted personally from the system, the Russian people and their lands have also been tragic victims of economic, social, and political decisions that were at best short-sighted, at worst, criminal and inhumane. With the development of glasnost, Russians have begun to express national

aspirations long suppressed or co-opted by Moscow. These national aspirations, coupled with antipathy toward communist rule, played a major role in the elections.

### Specific Issues

Despite the expanse of the RSFSR and the variety of political landscapes, several common issues ran through the campaign. The most prominent were:

- The poor state of the economy and social services. Glasnost has allowed Soviet citizens to say aloud what they already know: that the economy is bad and getting worse, the currency is worthless, and social services are abysmal. Many candidates called for increased subsidies and improved social services for pensioners, the disabled, and persons living alone. Pledges to work for improved health care could be seen on virtually every campaign poster. Some Russian cities are beginning to suffer even greater housing shortages than in the past, a result of population displacement in the wake of ethnic violence outside the RSFSR.
- The catastrophic state of the environment and the ruination of historic Russian lands. Fulfilling the Moscow-assigned economic plan at any cost has turned Russian lands and the air overhead into a disaster area. Even before Gorbachev's ascension to power, Russian nationalist writers were campaigning against the Moscow bureaucracy's grandiose plans to turn back the northerly flow of northern Russian rivers in order to irrigate Central Asian agricultural projects. Irresponsible lumbering practices, oil drilling, and railway construction have left large parts of Siberia in ruins. The polluting of world famous Lake Baikal by industrial run-off has become a *cause celebre*. Although the Chernobyl nuclear disaster took place in Ukraine and wreaked much of its havoc on the Belorussian SSR, the nationwide press coverage has produced a significant anti-nuclear mood in the RSFSR.
- A preoccupation with Russia's alleged disadvantaged position vis-a-vis other republics in terms of allocation of resources. Whether true or not and speeches by representatives of Central Asian republics would seem to bear out this claim -- Russians feel that too much of their financial and material resources are being transferred out of the Russian republic to support other republics. There is also growing resistance to exploiting natural resources simply to sell to the West for hard currency, or conversely, disposing of valuable hard currency for ideological reasons (the USSR, for instance, buys sugar from Cuba at prices eight times higher than it could in other markets). Some Russian nationalists have expressed disapproval of allowing foreign business to operate on Russian territory, lest they despoil the land for quick profit. Many candidates' platforms called for an end to

spending hard currency on Western technology and letting it fall apart through neglect.

- Loss of moral values and the resulting social cost. The publication of rising and heretofore suppressed crime statistics, the spread of organized crime and increasing random violence, widespread press coverage of such issues as prostitution, broken homes, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, the overall incivility of citizens toward one another, and other social pathologies made "moral rebirth" a major issue in the campaign. Restoration of rights for churches and, in many cases, the rights of religious organizations to participate in charitable works were included in many platforms.

- Establishment of social and political justice, and general disgust with "the powers that be." In the months prior to the elections, several RSFSR regional and city Party officials had been driven out of office by citizens fed up with the Party elites' privileges. (Interestingly enough, many Party officials in other Soviet republics have dexterously adapted themselves to the anti-Soviet or anti-Russian mood of their fellow nationals and remain in power.) At the very least, more and more average Russian citizens are demanding that their rulers live up to legal commitments written into existing Soviet law. Human rights veterans, and activists motivated by Gorbachev's reform policies, envision widening civil liberties in future legislation.

To one degree or another, almost all candidates from reformers to *apparatchiks* had adopted campaign rhetoric calling for legislation/programs to address the above issues. Campaign posters featured photos of the candidates and around 8-10 "bullets" underneath comprising his/her platform. The problem for the concerned voter was to figure out who was the most sincere or, at least, most competent.

## **PARTIES, PARTICIPANTS AND NON-PARTICIPANTS**

Other than the Communist Party, political parties were not legal at the time of the first round of Soviet elections. This did not prevent several groups and candidates from forming various "pre-election blocs" that bore resemblance to parties. These blocs were frequently coalitions of grassroots organizations formed to support either 1) certain candidates, or 2) causes such as the environment or the all-encompassing perestroika. Many of these grass roots organizations enjoy quasi-legal status as "voluntary societies" permitted by a 1987 law to register themselves through an existing government or party entity. These blocs promoted candidates not only for RSFSR deputies seats, but at all electoral levels (*oblast*, city, and neighborhood executive councils).

Unlike political parties in many countries, these blocs did not necessarily nominate candidates -- a privilege granted to labor collectives, neighborhood caucuses, or "registered" public organizations (see **Election Regulations**, below).

Given the fluid nature of Russia's nascent political culture, and the geographic immensity of the RSFSR, the linkage between blocs/groups in different areas, who had been endorsed by whom, etc., was not always clear. However, some pre-election blocs did present distinguishable programs and candidates. In the long run, "[there were] three forces in these elections: the democratic forces; the national patriotic forces; and the Party and trade union apparatus" ("Elections 90" group spokesman to *Financial Times*, March 1, 1990). As the election day approached, the lines between the last two became blurred.

### **The Party Apparatus**

The Communist Party "status quo" apparatus clearly made efforts to retain power by controlling nominations where reformist or anti-party sentiment was weak, or where the electorate was indifferent. Having secured nominations, the *apparatus* for obvious reasons eschewed a "business as usual" platform. Rather, the following tactics emerged: 1) co-opting the language of reform, reflecting general public concern about such issues as the economy and environment; 2) allying itself with the "patriotic front forces" (see below); and 3) subtly communicating to voters, particularly among workers and the elderly, that candidates with good Party connections would be in a better position to secure social services and funding for specific districts.

Long before the elections, political observers had noted that the Party had been caught off guard by the 1989 elections to the USSR Congress of People's Deputies when many of its stalwarts had been defeated by anti-establishment newcomers. "They won't let it happen again," said one liberal election law specialist.

### **The Leningrad Party Organization**

As a legitimate political force with a recognizable ideology -- other than staying in power -- the CPSU has been thoroughly discredited, factions are appearing, and its membership has fallen considerably. After the elections, one reform Party candidate told Soviet television that while he was canvassing for votes, "workers told me they would vote for anyone except for communists."

Ironically, one of the complaints of those who feel that communism had shortchanged Russia is the fact that there is no RSFSR Communist Party organization for its 10.6 million members. (According to one theory, this is to prevent Russian nationalist influence from becoming too powerful in the Politburo.) Consequently, there was no RSFSR Party platform. A reform wing of the Party, "Democratic Platform," aligned itself with the "Elections 90" bloc (see below).

Under the leadership of its recently selected Party chief, Boris Gidasov, the Leningrad *Oblast* Party organization has emerged to pick up the fallen banner. According to its platform of November 29, 1989, "the ideological basis of the Party was and remains creative (emphasis added) Marxism." The platform endorses "all movements advocating the Party's policy of perestroika and the renewal of society on a socialist basis." The legal enshrinement of the Party's leading role is rejected; nationalities are to be granted the satisfaction of their interests, "[provided such a policy] does not lead to exclusiveness and estrangement." Nevertheless, Gidasov chose not to stand for election in any of the local or RSFSR Congress races.

### **The Russian "Patriotic Bloc"**

In December 1989, twelve Russian cultural and political groups (including the formidable United Front of Russian Workers) formed the Russian Patriotic Bloc, promoting "conservative" positions such as 1) environmental protection and greater control over Russian natural resources, 2) protection of ethnic traditions for Russians and other "nationalities indigenous to Russian territory," and 3) promotion of traditional Russian spiritual values. The platform issued by the bloc criticizes reform elements in the Party leadership for allowing distortions of perestroika and allegedly weakening the economic and political power of the USSR. A pre-election rally on February 18, 1990 claimed that only "three powers could save the country: the working class, the church, and the army."

While the "Patriotic Front" purported to criticize the Communist Party, suspicions were expressed by some reform candidates that it had become the refuge for the Party *apparatus* looking for legitimacy before a hostile electorate: "The *apparatus* and this so-called patriotic front were really one and the same," Oleg Rummyantsev of the Social Democratic Association told the *Christian Science Monitor* (March 9, 1990). "Pamyat," the most notorious organized exponent of extremist Russian nationalism, did not openly play a large part in Patriotic Front activities.

### **Elections 90**

The first recognizable pre-election bloc (other than the Communist Party organization) was the Elections 90 group formed in October-November 1989 in Moscow to support candidates who pledged their support for democracy. Members of this coalition included representatives from such reformist organizations as "Memorial," the "Glasnost Club," the Moscow Popular Front, and the "Democratic Platform" faction of the Communist Party. Elections 90 was also joined by a splinter group from "Democratic Union," the leadership of which had called for a boycott of the elections (see below).

## **Democratic Russia**

One hundred and sixteen candidates for RSFSR deputy adopted the "Democratic Russia" (DR) platform in January 1990. DR called for a new RSFSR constitution conforming to international human rights agreements and an end to the Communist Party monopoly on power. In the area of civil liberties, the platform calls for: 1) expansion of civil rights, including the right to form political parties and labor unions; 2) complete freedom of speech and press; 3) freedom of conscience; 4) direct election to the Supreme Soviet rather than the two-stage process through the Congress of People's Deputies; and 5) limits on KGB powers.

In the economic sphere, Democratic Russia supports 1) creation of a market sector with an auxiliary program to ease transition from the planned economy, and 2) minimum wage guarantees and retraining for workers affected by economic restructuring.

Ultimately, Elections 90 and Democratic Russia formed a loose coalition, with Elections 90 concentrating primarily in Leningrad, and Democratic Russia in Moscow.

### **The Boycotters**

Certain groups and individuals called for boycotts of elections to what they considered illegitimate governing bodies. The leadership of the prominent nationwide Democratic Union called for a boycott (although some members did align themselves with the "Elections 90" faction), as did spokesman for the Crimean Tatar movement, who declared themselves unwilling to participate in the elections until the Crimean Tatar ASSR is reestablished. In December 1989, representatives of the "Tatar Social Center" of the Tatar ASSR (in the central RSFSR, not to be confused with Crimea on the Black Sea) called for a boycott of the elections pending acquisition of Union Republic status for the Tatar ASSR. When a member of the "Sverdlovsk Movement for Democratic Elections" was denied a position on the ballot, members of the group called for a boycott in his election district. In an open letter to former political prisoners running for office, veteran human rights activist Kirill Podrabinek wrote that "it is not that you are not worthy of the title of deputy, but the title of deputy is unworthy of you."

## **THE ELECTION LAW, PROCEDURES AND CAMPAIGNING**

### **RSFSR Election Law, General Provisions**

The election law of the RSFSR was promulgated in late October 1989 by the RSFSR Supreme Soviet and published on November 2. Voting for the RSFSR Congress of People's Deputies is universal, equal, secret and direct. Suffrage age is 18, and a republic deputy must be 21 years of age. Persons ruled incompetent by court decision,



those incarcerated, and those under court-ordered medical treatment are not permitted to vote.

### **Districting**

As noted above, the RSFSR is divided for voting purposes into 900 territorial districts (*okruga*) and 168 national-territorial districts established by the RSFSR Central Election Commission. The local governing bodies within these districts then create the approximate U.S. equivalent of wards (*uchastki*), having no fewer than 20 and no more than 3,000 voters. In "difficult to reach areas, polar stations, ships at sea," and military units, separate election districts may be created.

### **Nominating Procedure**

As stipulated by the election law, the nomination process began on December 4, 1989. Candidates are nominated by: 1) labor collectives -- generally a factory, government agency or academic institution; 2) a public organization registered before the electoral law went into effect (registration of public organizations is still technically governed by a 1932 law stipulating that such organizations be designed to "build socialism" or "strengthen the national defense," but in practice registration has become easier in the Gorbachev era); or 3) neighborhood caucuses in the election district where the proposed candidate resides. These caucuses are convened with the permission of the local governing council and the district electoral commission. In order to secure nomination through the neighborhood caucus, at least 300 supporters of the proposed candidate must attend the meeting. Military units are also allowed to put forth candidates within districts secured at the request of the unit commander. As might be expected, reform and anti-apparatus candidates tended to be nominated by neighborhood caucuses or public organizations, while Party loyalists were put forth by labor collectives.

Each candidate was permitted to appoint five "trusted agents" (*doverenniye litsa*) who could legally represent him during the campaign and be present at the vote count in his absence.

In order to run for RSFSR deputy from a territorial district, a candidate must either live or work within the administrative region into which the district falls. Candidates from national-territorial districts, however, need only reside in the RSFSR. This last provision made it possible for the members of the Party "old guard" to choose rural and generally safe districts rather than run in more politically active urban districts where the opposition might have been stronger.

When the dust had settled on the nominating procedure, a total of 7,018 candidates, 84 percent of whom were males, found themselves competing for 1,068 seats in the Russian Federation. Some electoral districts had over 20 contenders, while 33 others had

only one candidate. The Soviet press noted the preponderance of one-candidate districts in Komi ASSR. In the city of Ivanovo, the Party apparatus secured virtually all the nominations.

### **Campaign Financing and Supervision**

The law states that the government provides for campaign expenses, and outside funding by "enterprises, offices, organizations, government and public organs, and individual citizens" is specifically prohibited. At first glance, this may appear favorable. Candidates were provided an opportunity to have their photo and brief campaign platform produced on a group poster at the expense of the District Election Commission. But practice soon revealed the potential for abuse, as candidates with access to paper and photocopy equipment were soon putting out their own posters. In Moscow, the abuse became so blatant that one candidate threatened to go to court, and the District Election Commission permitted all candidates to produce their own posters. By election day, most of Moscow's walls and fences were plastered with individual candidates' posters of varying artistic quality. The same was true in Leningrad, according to Western observers.

Supervision of the elections and responsibility for upholding the election laws fell upon the District (i.e. "territory" or "national-territory") Election Commission, whose members are nominated -- as in the case of the candidates -- from labor collectives, registered organizations, and public caucuses. Responsibility for conducting the elections at the polling places, tallying the votes, informing voters as to the location of their polling places, etc., is the responsibility of the Ward Election Commission.

Challenges to the voting procedure at specific polling places are filed with Ward Election Commissions, while challenges about the overall conduct of the campaign, election law violations, etc., are directed to the District Election Commission, or, if the violation is on an especially large scale, to the RSFSR Central Election Commission.

Candidates who violate the election law are subject to one warning by the District Election Commission. Repetition can bring removal from the ballot, although there were no confirmed reports that this occurred.

The composition of election commissions reflected significantly on their conscientious application of the law. In localities where the Party apparatus had managed to place many of its minions on the commissions, reform candidates complained of numerous instances of apparent collusion by the *apparatus* and the commissions against them.

## **Run-offs, New Elections**

The winning candidate was required to collect 50 percent of the votes cast. If none did, run-off elections between the two biggest vote-getters were scheduled two weeks later. If less than 50 percent of the eligible voters cast ballots, new elections with new candidates were required. As it transpired, run-off elections were necessary in the vast majority of cases (see below).

## **Voter Records**

Voting lists are compiled by the district election commission based on residence files provided to the regional executive (i.e. governing) committees by residential housing offices. An eligible voter who moves into an area after the voters lists are completed can be added to the list and vote upon presentation of the proper documentation.

Voters who intend to be out of town on the day of the election can obtain an absentee ballot, which, unlike U.S. practice, does not afford the right to mail the ballot back to the home district, but rather to vote in the place where the voter is located on election day. In such cases, the voter's name is taken off the voting list in the home district, thus maintaining the potential for 100 percent voter attendance.

## **Voting and Counting Procedures**

Polls are open from 7 a.m. until 8 p.m. Voters do not cast ballots for a candidate, but cross out the names of those they do not wish to see elected. If more than one name remains uncrossed-out, the ballot is declared invalid.

Having ascertained that the prospective voter is duly registered on the voting list, the commission worker hands the voter a paper ballot containing the full names of the candidates in alphabetical order, their occupation and residence. According to the law, the voter is then supposed to pass through a curtained booth -- in order to vote in secret -- and drop the ballot into a waiting box (urn) on the other side. In practice, some voters chose to ignore the line to the booth, but just marked the ballot on a convenient table, or friend's back, and went around the booth to drop the ballot in. This procedure is a departure from previous practice, according to which the voting booth stood to one side, and voters who chose to vote against the single candidate listed -- and thus against the system -- either had to cross out the candidate's name in full view of everyone, or draw attention to oneself by entering the booth.

If a registered voter is unable to show up at the polls by mid-afternoon (or even earlier in some districts) election workers physically carry the ballot sheets and ballot box to the voter's residence to get the vote.

According to the law, ballots are counted immediately after the polls close. In most cases, the boxes are emptied out on the polling booth tables, parcelled out among the election workers and counted up. When the tally is complete, it is certified by the chairman, vice-chairman, and secretary of the election commission and the results are sent to the district election commission. These results are then communicated to the RSFSR Central Election Commission, which is required to publish the results within a ten-day period.

## Campaigning

Candidates sought votes the old-fashioned way: going from apartment to apartment, they canvassed neighborhoods, while their "trusted agents" and supporters put up campaign posters and passed out leaflets. In Moscow, it was impossible to reach busy candidates by phone before 11 p.m, and usually not even then.

As noted above, the prohibition on production of individual campaign posters was dropped in Moscow (and apparently also in Leningrad). Consequently, by election day most of Moscow's walls and fences were plastered with posters appealing to the electorate to support a specific candidate. As a rule, posters included a photo of the candidate, a list of his or her professional or civic accomplishments, and one or more standard campaign pledges. Some posters were signed by groups supporting the candidate, others were unsigned. There was an assumption by candidates and voters that unsigned posters were the product of the *apparat*, and in few cases, the words *apparat* or *nomenklatura* were scrawled in pen or pencil across the copy. Moscow's Taganka district featured posters with drawings of police officers protecting citizens from various and sundry dangers, and an appeal to vote for the "militia ticket" (the appeal was at least partially successful, as the run-off elections pitted "Democratic Russia" candidate Leonid Volkov against the head of the Taganka Militia District, L.V. Nikitin).

In Moscow's Kievsky national-territorial district, one of the candidates was Yuri Kashlev, chief of the Foreign Ministry's Humanitarian Affairs Department and head of the USSR delegation at the Vienna CSCE Follow-up Meeting. His posters claimed that his name "was linked with the struggle for human rights and the achievements of Soviet diplomacy."

By law, no campaigning is permitted on election day. In theory, candidates have organized opportunities to "meet the voters" at assemblies staged by the district election commissions. Most candidates (in Moscow, at least) complained that such meetings were poorly organized, and candidates were not provided enough time to seriously discuss the issues. In one district, each candidate was allotted a total of seven minutes for his/her presentation and answering questions.

## Media Coverage

There is no specific provision in the election law for media coverage of candidates, and many candidates did complain of lack of coverage in the press and electronic media. In the city of Tula, the *oblast* newspaper refused to publish the platform of the Party's "Democratic Platform" (*The Washington Post*, March 3, 1990). In many areas, the newspapers limited themselves to reprinting the photos and brief campaign platforms produced by the elections commissions. On the other hand, *Pravda* accused the progressive Leningrad newspaper *Smena* of giving too much coverage to reformist anti-Party candidates. The editor, Viktor Yugin, claimed that he had offered space to the Party candidates, but they had chosen not to accept the offer.

One complaint heard from candidates was that some candidates who held other official positions would publish articles in the press or appear on television to discuss non-election related issues, but would be identified as candidates for office, thus providing them with publicity and an oblique opportunity to campaign. Conversely, two candidates regularly featured on the popular television broadcast *Vzglyad* voluntarily left the show for the duration of the campaign.

With a few exceptions, lack of media coverage produced numerous complaints by voters that they were uninformed about the candidates. For many voters, the campaign posters in the foyers of the polling places provided their first opportunity to acquaint themselves with their candidates' views. A member of the RSFSR Central Election Commission stated that voters had too little information about the candidates.

## Getting Out The Vote Officially

In the Soviet Union, virtually every urban apartment building falls under the jurisdiction of a specific factory or government institution. In the past, "agitators" from these institutions were assigned to canvas apartments and "get out the vote". Failure to vote could cause unpleasant consequences, usually starting at the work place, both for the recalcitrant citizen and the agitator responsible for delivering his voters. Desiring neither to risk one's own well-being, nor to be particularly malevolent toward the agitator ("...who's just another working stiff trying to get along," said a *samizdat* document of 1983) voters tended to show up at the polls. The 99.5 percent voter turnout reported by the Soviet press in the past may have been mendacious, but the percentages were undoubtedly much higher than in the Free World.

This year, many voters reported either no contact with agitators, or somewhat indifferent reminders that March 4 was election day. In some apartment houses, leaflets appeared on doors and in stairwells to this effect. One Moscow voter suggested that agitators had limited their activities because 1) they no longer feared consequences of low voter turnout, 2) they had no wish to be on the receiving end of long harangues

from angry voters, and 3) knowing the mood of the electorate, Party officials were more interested in keeping voter turnout low in areas where reform candidates stood a good chance of winning.

## IRREGULARITIES AND ELECTION LAW VIOLATIONS

The campaign featured numerous complaints of election law violations and other irregularities, levelled both against the Party *apparatus* and rival candidates. Massive fraud has not been charged; in public statements, the RSFSR Central Election Commission has referred to future investigations of alleged election law violations.

### Nominating Irregularities

As mentioned above, nominations could be made by "public organizations" that had to be registered prior to promulgation of the RSFSR election law. The prominent and politically active Moscow "Memorial Society" was denied registration by city authorities for over a year, and thus denied the opportunity to file nominations. In other reported cases, electoral commissions heavily infiltrated by Party officials attempted to disqualify reform candidates nominated by public organizations or neighborhood caucuses on specious or trivial grounds. For instance, the requirement that at least 300 supporters of a candidate be present throughout the neighborhood caucus meant that opponents of a specific nomination could drag out or disrupt a caucus meeting to the point where enough supporters would grow frustrated and leave.

### Campaign Irregularities

During the campaign, a wide variety of dirty tricks were practiced against candidates, not all of which could necessarily be laid at the *apparatus's* door. Scurrilous and mendacious leaflets attacking candidates circulated in election districts. Posters were torn down, or left standing with graffiti accusing the candidate of real or imagined vices. Stars of David, and the epithet "Zionist" were scrawled on some candidates' posters, in some cases with a Jewish patronymic circled. One candidate's posters were adorned with the claim that his father was one of Beria's henchmen, while another was accused of "abusing the late [immensely popular singer and actor Vladimir] Vysotsky".

At least two candidates told *Moscow News* that they had been incorrectly included in published lists of candidates supported by the "Patriotic Front." According to retired Army colonel Vitaly Urazhtsev, a leader of the military reform organization "Shield," and candidate from Moscow's Gagarin district, two carloads of soldiers were apprehended two nights before the run-off elections pasting up leaflets containing slanderous attacks against Urazhtsev. Also in Moscow, "Pamyat" activists tried to break up at least one "Meet the Candidates" gathering.

In localities where election commissions were controlled by the Party apparatus, reform candidates complained of obstructionism against them, specifically, delays in responding to complaints and releasing necessary information to "favored" candidates, and somehow not informing others. "But still", said one candidate for local office, "they're getting better at concealing their bias."

### **Election Day, Vote Count Irregularities**

Prior to the election, *Komsomolskaya Pravda* reported that election tally sheets in the city of Tula were filled in before the election took place. City officials claimed that they were just practice sheets that had mistakenly not been labeled as such.

In at least one city, citizens complained that the local election commission had changed the location of the polling places without properly notifying voters.

In a voting district in Moscow, a candidate and two of his trusted agents were prevented from being present at the vote count for "arriving too late." The room was too small, said an election commission official (the candidate won a run-off slot anyway).

In the same Moscow district, the tally sheets made an unscheduled stop at the Regional Executive Committee, i.e., the local governing body, before going to the district election commission, although this is not stipulated in the law.

In Irkutsk, the small margin of victory for Russian nationalist writer Valery Khairusov over Lt. Colonel Budko of the Shield organization was apparently provided by the military units stationed in Mongolia, but attached to the election district in which Khairusov and Budko faced off.

A few days after the election, *Sovietskaya Rossiya* reported several instances of election day irregularities and apparent fraud. Charges of ballot box stuffing were leveled both by official sources and candidates. According to several sources, the time-honored practice of one member of the family voting for the entire family was still practiced (see below).

The existence of voting districts within military units or on board ships at sea provided at least a potential for fraud, as results could be cabled in without any outside monitoring.

## PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS -- KRASNODAR

Krasnodar, in the Kuban region of the North Caucasus, is a city of approximately 700,000 inhabitants. It was originally founded in the late 1700s by the Kuban Cossacks who were granted the territory by Catherine the Great (the city's pre-revolutionary name was Ekaterinodar, the gift of Catherine). Unlike many Soviet cities, the downtown area contains many private homes, with trees in abundance. The government buildings are not multi-storied steel and concrete look-a-likes, but more often pre-revolutionary buildings. (One of the marriage registration offices was the home of Faina Kaplan, would-be assassin of Lenin in 1918.) Krasnodar and the entire North Caucasus area have of late become a refuge for many Armenians fleeing the conflict in Azerbaijan.

### The Political Landscape

Compared to other areas of the RSFSR, Krasnodar has been considered one of the most politically stagnant, under firm control of the Communist Party *apparatus*. The previous regional Party leader, Medunov, was notorious as one of the most corrupt officials of the Brezhnev era. His successor, Ivan Kuzmich Polozkov, has been critical of President Gorbachev's reform policies and the cooperative movement.

According to a local sociologist and political activist, several other factors contribute to Krasnodar's quiescence: 1) relatively fertile soil and warm weather provide a decent quantity of foodstuffs, and many residents of the city have either their own private gardens or parents living in nearby villages with gardens and poultry; 2) like the Baltic States, Krasnodar and the North Kuban area have become a favorite retirement area for former military and KGB officers, who make up an estimated 25 percent of the city's population and are politically conservative; and 3) the textile industry employs many young women from outlying rural areas who are reluctant to become politically active at the risk of losing their city residence permits.

Some sources predicted that with the passage of the new property law, there would be an upsurge of political activity as industrious citizens wishing to acquire and work the land will probably run into resistance from the old guard.

A nascent "Democratic Movement of Kuban" has been formed, as well as a chapter of Democratic Union and Memorial. There is also a small extreme nationalist movement suspected of being allied with Pamyat called the "Kuban Patriotic Movement."

According to activists, most of the candidates to the RSFSR Congress of Peoples Deputies were *apparatus* nominees whose candidacies had been a foregone conclusion. A few "democrats" had managed to get on the ballot, however. The *apparatus* had done its best to interfere with the campaigns of the latter, removing "offensive" statements from one



candidate's press statements, and trying to keep another candidate from speaking to students at a local college.

The major issues, insofar as they could be clearly defined, were general dissatisfaction with living standards and social services, and the environment. The local press had devoted attention to various environmental failures, including a disastrous dam project and destruction of the soil through poor fertilization practices. In 1987, construction of an atomic power station was cancelled after protests from local environmental activists.

### **Election Day**

According to a long-time resident of Krasnodar, Election Day 1990 in his city was just like the past election days, except the turnout was considerably lower. Local television reported about a 65-70 percent turnout. As has been the custom in the past, voters were greeted with festive music over loudspeakers and sumptuous buffets. A few voters studied the candidates' posters in the foyer. Many said this was their first opportunity to acquaint themselves with the candidates and their positions, although the same information had been published a few days earlier in the regional paper.

The mood was superficially tranquil. In the five election wards visited, there were none of the disputes between candidates or their representatives and election commission officials, which had been reported from other areas. At around 10:30 a.m., three election workers took one of the ballot boxes and headed for the apartment complexes to track down missing voters and their votes. The vote count at polling place 35-35-10 of national-territorial district No. 17 took place without incident.

The candidates in national-territorial district No. 17 were 1) the head of the Krasnodar Regional KGB and member of the USSR Writers' Union, 2) the chairman of the local automobile club, 3) another member of the USSR Writers' Union and 4) a factory director.

Despite the tranquil atmosphere, there was a mood of protest underneath. Many voters said that they did not know for whom they were voting, but rather against whom they were voting: "if he's the director of a factory or the boss of some institute, I figured he's a Party hack, so I crossed him out; if he's old, he must be a Stalinist."

One positive endorsement came from a woman who said that she and her family had decided to vote for a woman candidate who promised to improve the situation for women. In at least one case, a father voted for his daughter after assuring the election worker that "we're all of the same opinion back at the house."

Interviewed at the buffet, many voters admitted they felt it was a hopeless exercise, that nothing would change, but they were still grateful to Gorbachev for "letting us let the bosses know what we think, instead of coming here to eat the food and go home." Several persons noted that they had been more enthusiastic over last year's elections to the USSR Congress of People's Deputies, but "all they do in Moscow is talk, and nothing gets done," so they did not expect much to come out of the RSFSR Congress.

Of approximately two dozen voters queried, only one indicated that she had voted for a Party official in the hope that he would command enough "pull" to secure benefits for her area. Even in this case, she chose the younger of the *apparatchiks*, since "the old ones lost touch with the people long ago."

A few voters admitted that they had more or less gone through the motions, since "they keep a list at work of who voted." However, at least one man visiting friends in Krasnodar admitted that in the past he would have voted in order to avoid problems at work, but this time he "didn't get around to it."

### **The Results**

Despite the pessimistic predictions by reformers, about 20 percent of the immediate victors or run-off candidates were "democrats."

### **THE RESULTS -- RSFSR**

Of the 1,068 seats up for election, only 120 were decided in the first round of voting on March 4. In Ulyanovsk, Lenin's birthplace, only 45 percent of the eligible voters turned out for the first round. After the March 18 run-off elections, 1,026 seats were filled.

As a result of electoral irregularities, 2,230,439 ballots were declared invalid out of approximately 180 million potential ballots for territorial and national-territorial districts. The chairman of the RSFSR Central Election Commission said on March 26, 1990 that the results in perhaps fifteen districts may be contested.

The election results revealed continuing strength of the Party apparatus -- especially outside major urban areas -- or its ability to manipulate the process: 86 percent of the new RSFSR People's Deputies were Communist Party members. A large number of regional Party secretaries were elected. The Party itself, however, is factionalized and fatigued, and membership per se will not mean lockstep unity on issues.

Moscow elected several prominent reformers, including at least two former political prisoners: Moscow Helsinki Group member Sergei Kovalev and Father Gleb Yakunin, an Orthodox priest who was released from internal exile in March 1987 and defeated a

hierarchy-backed clergyman by 47-40 percent. Other reformers or "anti-establishment" figures elected from Moscow include Viktor Aksyuchits, editor of *Vybory*, (the Russian Orthodox journal), *Argumenty i fakty* editor and Gorbachev nemesis Viktor Starkov, and outspoken economist Tatyana Koryagina. Boris Yeltsin won his seat in Sverdlovsk on the first round, although his chances of being elected Chairman of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet seemed to have dimmed, given the preponderance of Party regulars elected. Retired Army officer and Shield leader Vitaly Urazhtsev won by 10,000 votes.

In the city of Leningrad, twenty-five of thirty-four RSFSR Congress seats were won by "Democrats." The local KGB chief was defeated, along with several other high-ranking regional and city officials.

According to the Soviet news agency INTERFAX, three "radicals" took deputies' seats from Volgograd. In the Kuzbass coal basin, miner-supported candidates took about ten seats.

While the Party *apparatus* was not to be denied its seats, the extreme nationalist "Patriotic Front" organizations fared poorly, losing almost every clear face-off with the "democrats". This tendency continues the pattern of last year's elections to the USSR Congress of People's Deputies, when Pamyat-backed candidates were roundly defeated.

## OUTLOOK

The presence of deputies in the RSFSR People's Congress such as Kovalev, Yakunin, and other reformers should have an invigorating impact on the political landscape in the RSFSR, and the Soviet Union. Although they will be outnumbered by apparatchiks and careerists, their new status as Peoples Deputies will help keep them in the public eye.

However, the ability of reformers in the RSFSR Congress or the smaller Supreme Soviet to muckrake should not be overemphasized. As peoples' representatives, they will face growing demands by their constituents to address specific, day-to-day issues such as housing, health, and economic progress, while still having to fight resistance from Party regulars and the huge, adversarial bureaucracy.

Despite the overwhelming preponderance of Russians in the RSFSR, several ethnic issues may also keep the deputies busy. Some of these are: 1) the movement to upgrade the Tatar ASSR to Union Republic status; 2) ethnic Germans seeking reestablishment of the pre-World War II Volga German ASSR; 3) demands by some Russian nationalists for inclusion of Crimea, now an *oblast* of the Ukrainian SSR, into the RSFSR; 4) ethnic Finnish (Karelian) suggestions to renegotiate the 1940 treaty that ceded Finnish territory north of Leningrad to the Soviet Union; and 5) the proposal by influential Russians in

Eastern Siberia to form a Far Eastern SSR. As ethnic and political tensions between Moscow and other republics continue or intensify, the Russian government will also face the problem of Russians relocating back to the RSFSR. There are an estimated 30 million Russians living outside the "homeland."

Finally, there is the issue of the relationship between Russia and the Soviet Union as a whole. Since the time of the Revolution, Russian interests and Soviet national interests have been purported to be identical. This is clearly no longer the case. As the Soviet government attempts to form a workable federative system, and as other republic legislatures stake out agendas independent from that of Moscow, the support of the Russian legislature for the central government's initiatives may become vital for Moscow.\* Vitaly Urazhtsev, mentioned above, has already announced his intention to press for a referendum "so that the Russian Federation has the opportunity to choose [those Union laws] which suit the population."

\* Moscow announced on March 24, 1990 that President Gorbachev had brought two of Russia's most prominent nationalists, writer Valentin Rasputin and USSR Supreme Soviet deputy and chairman of the United Front of Russian Workers, Veniamin Yarin, into his Presidential cabinet.

# REPORT ON THE MARCH 4, 1990 SUPREME SOVIET ELECTIONS IN UKRAINE

Kiev, Ukraine



March 30, 1990

*This report is based on the findings of a Helsinki Commission staff delegation to Kiev, Ukraine, from March 15 through March 19, 1990 to observe the political processes taking shape around the March 18 Ukrainian Supreme Soviet run-off elections. The delegation interviewed representatives of the Ukrainian Popular Movement Rukh, the Ukrainian Helsinki Union and other independent groups; the Central Election Commission and officials from district electoral commissions; journalists; candidates, candidates' supporters, and voters. Other sources used in this report include the Ukrainian Press Agency, Radio Liberty reports, The Ukrainian Weekly, The New York Times, Los Angeles Times, and private U.S. citizens present during the March 4 Ukrainian elections.*

\* \* \*

## SUMMARY

- The Ukrainian Supreme Soviet elections, held on March 4 with run-offs on March 18, were hotly contested with some 3,000 candidates vying for 450 seats in the first round, of which 331 seats were forced into run-off elections.
- Recent elections in Ukraine, although conducted under imperfect conditions, with laws and practices as well as actual election interference limiting the chances of opposition to the Communist Party, resulted in legislative bodies, from the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet down to district councils, with significant opposition representation. Opposition candidates won over 25 percent of the seats to the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet.
- Although the "Ukrainian on the street" seemed somewhat pessimistic regarding the likelihood of change in the republic, voter turnout was high. Residents could be seen and heard discussing politics on the street and attending rallies and election meetings, often mixing the hottest issues of the day, such as self-determination, with purely local concerns.
- The elections were marred by numerous irregularities, both in campaigning and at the polls. Many opposition candidates were not permitted to register, received unequal media access, and found themselves the targets of smear campaigns. Both the March 4 and March 18 elections saw allegations of fraud ranging from voter intimidation to multiple voting to lack of strict controls. The extent to which irregularities affected the final outcome is not yet clear.
- The Democratic Bloc of opposition groups formed to contest the elections successfully focused the campaign on voters' concerns, inducing Communist Party candidates often to follow suit. High on voters' lists were greater political autonomy, national and cultural issues, the failing economy, the environment, and greater democratization and human rights.
- The Democratic Bloc itself is a heterogeneous grouping of progressive interests -- as indeed is Rukh, its main component. Primarily drawing strength from nationalists in western Ukraine and urban intellectuals, Rukh contains both Party members and former political prisoners. Already, as a result of its success in the elections and in organizing events such as the human chain from Kiev to Lviv on January 22, Rukh is faced with difficult choices about its future, particularly in regard to the question of Ukrainian independence. Although as of this writing it appears to have stepped back from calls for the formation of a Rukh party, this issue will probably reappear. Other groups included in Rukh are either forming or planning to form alternative parties, including the Ukrainian Helsinki Union, the Greens, and the Democratic Peasants Party.

Obviously, then, forces for genuine competitive democracy exist in Ukraine. The question ahead is at what speed and in what form can these forces become effective, and whether they can keep abreast of popular demands for change.



## **VISA DENIALS TO HELSINKI COMMISSION DELEGATION**

On March 1, 1990, the Helsinki Commission, following a week of mixed signals from the Soviet authorities, received word from Yevgeny Primakov, chairman of the Council of the Union of the USSR Supreme Soviet, that a delegation of Congressmen would not be permitted to travel to Ukraine for the March 4 elections. A group of six Helsinki Commissioners and other Members of Congress, led by Representative Don Ritter, the Commission's Ranking Minority House Member, was to travel to Kiev in order to observe the republic elections and to familiarize themselves with the issues and key political actors in Ukraine. Another group of Helsinki Commissioners and other legislators, led by Commission Chairman Senator Dennis DeConcini, was effectively denied permission to travel to Latvia and Estonia for the March 18 elections there.

The Kiev-bound delegation had received an invitation from four Ukrainian members of the USSR Congress of Peoples Deputies in early February. On February 21, the Commission was informed by the Soviet Embassy in Washington that these invitations were not considered to be official. Attempts to secure invitations from the Ukrainian SSR Supreme Soviet and the USSR Supreme Soviet were unsuccessful.

Commission Chairman DeConcini and Co-Chairman Steny H. Hoyer strongly criticized the visa denials, calling them "a serious breach of the comity and cooperation developed over the last few years between the Congress and the Supreme Soviet" and noting that "these denials are incongruent with the opening up of Soviet society and the democratization process." The Chairman and Co-Chairman also questioned the need for official invitations, noting that "Soviet legislators do not need official invitations, or any invitations for that matter, to observe elections in the United States."

## **THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE**

The political landscape of Ukraine reflects its complex historical and cultural divisions. The large non-Ukrainian and Russified Ukrainian population keeps the question of independence from becoming as immediate as in some other republics. Nevertheless, the national question is crucial. Strong sentiment exists among many segments of the population, and even in the Party apparatus, for greater political, cultural and economic autonomy.

Ukraine is the largest republic of the Soviet Union after the Russian republic. Almost 20 percent of the Soviet population resides in Ukraine. It is rich in natural and human resources and vital to the Soviet economy. A rich agricultural region, it is heavily industrialized and provides almost half of the Soviet Union's iron ore, a quarter of its coal and more than one-fifth of its grain, milk, and meat. About one-half of all atomic power for the Soviet Union is produced in Ukraine.

The republic government has been highly conservative, lagging behind in glasnost under Volodymyr Shcherbytsky, who was replaced in September 1989 by the conservative, albeit more flexible Volodymyr Ivashko. The March elections, particularly to the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet, are crucial in that they present the first real possibility of introducing more reform-minded elements into all levels of the Ukrainian government at a time when power is increasingly devolving to it from Moscow and the Party apparatus. Development of a multi-party system or further weakening of the Communist Party would make the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet the dominant political institution in the republic. Given the importance of Ukraine to the Soviet Union, the results of elections in Ukraine are being carefully watched from Moscow and will provide the key to events not just in Ukraine.

### **Brief Historical Background**

Ukrainians comprise the largest European national group without their own independent state. Ukraine is the largest non-Russian Republic in the Soviet Union, with a population of 52 million, nearly 80 percent of whom are Ukrainians (with Russian, Jewish, Polish and other minorities). Long known as the breadbasket of the USSR, Ukraine plays an essential role in the Soviet economy, making the Soviet leadership sensitive to manifestations of national feeling among Ukrainians.

Ukraine, whose capital Kiev was the center of the medieval Kievan Rus' state, is widely regarded as the cradle of East Slavic culture. Since the independent 17th century Cossack state, it has been a battleground for Russia and Poland, partitioned between them or under their influence for most of recent history. This history has brought about important religious, cultural and political differences: western Ukraine, which did not come into the Soviet Union until the 1939 partition of Poland, is largely Catholic and much more politically active and independence-minded; largely Orthodox eastern Ukraine has suffered intensive Russification since the 18th century and has a greater percentage of non-Ukrainian residents. These differences have had a profound impact on the pace of Ukraine's moves towards independence.

After a brief period of independence from Russian rule (1918-21), most of Ukraine was incorporated into the Soviet Union. During the forcible collectivization of agriculture in 1932-33, more than 6 million Ukrainian peasants died in a famine brought on by the confiscation of grain and other food supplies by Soviet authorities. During and after World War II, there was armed resistance to both Nazi German and Soviet rule, especially in the more nationalistic western Ukraine.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the movement for Ukrainian cultural and national rights revived as young intellectuals began to confront the problems of Russification of the Ukrainian language and culture. They were met with waves of arrests in 1965-66, 1968 and in 1972, when over 150 intellectuals were arrested.

Despite these repressions, activism continued undeterred. The Ukrainian Helsinki Group, founded in 1976 following the 1975 signing of the Helsinki Final Act of the 35-nation Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, was the largest Soviet Helsinki group and suffered more repression than any other. The group reported on Soviet restrictions of basic civil rights as well as the denial of Ukrainian national rights, focusing on the preservation of Ukrainian culture, the pursuit of self-determination and the documentation of persecution. In March 1988, the Ukrainian Helsinki Group was re-established as the Ukrainian Helsinki Union.

### **Recent Developments in Ukraine**

Soviet authorities now allow greater scope for Ukrainian cultural activity and tolerate the proliferation of Ukrainian unofficial newsletters, journals, and other publications. Many official newspapers and journals in Ukraine have become more open fora for serious discussion of political issues. Helsinki Commission staff observed independent publications, in great demand, being freely sold in the streets and subways of Kiev. Nevertheless, repression and censorship in Ukraine still exist, especially given the government's sensitivity to Ukrainian nationalism.

Increasing demands for the use of the Ukrainian language resulted in an important Ukrainian SSR Supreme Soviet decree stipulating that as of January 1, 1990, Ukrainian is the state language of the republic, while Russian is to be used for communication between nationality groups.

Informal groups are flourishing and large rallies calling for greater cultural and political rights have become commonplace, especially in the more nationally conscious western Ukraine. While most demonstrations, some involving crowds of several hundred thousand, have taken place without incident, others have been violently broken up and their organizers harassed. On January 22, over 500,000 people commemorated the anniversary of the January 22, 1918 declaration of Ukrainian independence by forming a human chain from Kiev to Lviv. Since then, there have been several pre-election rallies organized by independent political groups which have attracted tens of thousands.

### **THE ISSUES**

Themes that dominated the campaign included political, cultural, environmental, and economic issues. Long suppressed national feelings are now sweeping the Ukrainian population, especially in western Ukraine. The question of Ukraine's status and relationship to the rest of the Soviet Union is now openly discussed by both independent groups and the Party, and was reflected in campaign platforms of the Communist Party, independent groups, and individual candidates. The desirability of a multiparty system and more political autonomy for Ukraine was on the minds of many voters.

A major concern for many Ukrainians is linguistic and cultural Russification, particularly in eastern Ukraine, which had long been part of the Russian empire. The use of Russian was obligatory in universities and government and there is a disproportionate amount of Russian-language publications and television programming in Ukraine. Russification led to the neglect and even destruction of Ukrainian cultural, historical and religious objects (churches, documents, etc.) and the falsification of Ukrainian history. Although the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet has decreed that Ukrainian will be the state language of the republic, the slow pace of Ukrainianization, exemplified by the lack of Ukrainian-language schools, was a key voter concern.

Virtually all of the candidates' election materials reflected the Ukrainian population's concern with the environment. Ukraine is an area of acute ecological problems. In addition to the lingering effects of the April 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster, numerous industrial cities in Ukraine are extremely polluted and huge steel works and chemical factories in eastern Ukraine have been bitterly attacked by local ecological groups. According to some sources, one in four children in some eastern Ukrainian cities is ill as a result of environmental pollution from industry and pesticides.

Within the last year, disconcerting reports have emerged on the health effects of Chernobyl, and even Soviet Ukrainian officials are becoming more candid in their assessment of Chernobyl's health consequences. Hundreds of children have become sick with thyroid problems, cataracts of the eyes, and illnesses resulting from a general weakening of their immune systems. In some districts, residents have been consuming contaminated products for over three years. Recently, a Soviet report revealed that there have been more than 250 Chernobyl-related deaths. Many candidates called for the elimination of atomic energy plants, and the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet has announced that the Chernobyl plant will be phased out of operation over the next five years.

Aside from cultural and environmental concerns, Ukrainian voters identified economic problems as an important electoral issue. A low and, according to virtually every person interviewed by Helsinki Commission staff, falling standard of living, the shortages of goods reflected in the length of time required to obtain housing, cars, and other necessities have fueled the already existing resentment towards the Party apparatus. Campaign platforms reflected concern over the inability of wages to keep up with growing inflation. Candidates, including Party nominees, favored economic sovereignty for Ukraine -- the ability of Ukraine to control its own resources and products. Starting from January 1991, Ukraine is scheduled to become "a fully cost-accounting republic."

A survey of platforms and other themes found in the campaign included human rights, establishment of the rule of law and a multiparty system, freedom of religion (particularly the status of the Ukrainian Catholic and Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox

Churches), freedom of information, and social issues, such as quality of medical care and status of pensions.

## **THE PLAYERS**

### **Independent Groups**

Informal groups have been instrumental in raising environmental, cultural, and political concerns, thus acting as a significant force in pushing for the reversal of decades of cultural Russification, environmental degradation and political suppression. They have a potent political dimension, evident in their strong election showing and their representation in the Supreme Soviet, that will make them instrumental in the evolution of Ukrainian politics. While the Communist Party's authority is eroding, it still exercises substantial control over the mechanisms of power, and hence, over the day-to-day life of the people.

### ***Cultural***

Important cultural groups are gaining prominence and political strength. The Taras Shevchenko Ukrainian Language Society, named in honor of Ukraine's greatest poet, and the Ukrainian Association of Independent Creative Intelligentsia (publisher of the unofficial journal *Kafedra*) have organized to advance the restoration of the Ukrainian language and cultural heritage and the preservation of cultural, historical and religious monuments. The Memorial Society has focused on shedding light on so-called "blank spots" in Soviet Ukrainian history and exposing the full extent of Stalin's numerous crimes in Ukraine, including the 1932-33 famine. Within the last year, mass graves of Ukrainians slaughtered during the Stalin era were unearthed in Bykivnia near Kiev and Demianiv Laz near the western Ukrainian city of Ivano-Frankivsk, in part because of Memorial's efforts.

Similarly, cultural activity among the other nationalities in Ukraine is growing, especially among Ukraine's 700,000 member Jewish community, whose efforts to promote their religion and culture had long been suppressed.

### ***Environmental***

Following the Chernobyl disaster, environmental groups such as *Zeleny Svit* (Green World) have become increasingly active, and some informal groups have called for a nuclear-free Ukraine. Demonstrations calling for greater respect for the environment have attracted tens of thousands of people. The Greens have successfully campaigned against the Crimean and Chyhyryn nuclear plants, both of which were shut down in 1989.

## *Rukh*

Within the last year, the human rights movement in Ukraine has gained popular support, spanning a spectrum of Soviet Ukrainian society. It has striven for democracy within a state based on the rule of law and for national rights. The largest and most significant independent political movement is the Popular Movement in Ukraine, commonly known as Rukh. Rukh has consolidated a range of official and unofficial reformist elements and attracted wide popular support.

Despite obstacles from the conservative Ukrainian Communist Party leadership, the Ukrainian Popular Movement was formed in September 1989, an event perceived by many as marking a revival of Ukraine as a nation. On September 8 - 10, over 1,000 delegates representing regional (*oblast*) organizations of Rukh met in Kiev and with unprecedented candor demanded greater political and economic sovereignty for Ukraine.

Rukh's platform, as outlined in the program and statutes adopted by the Congress, resembles those adopted by the popular fronts in the Baltic States upon their founding a year ago. Guided by "the principles of humanism, democracy, glasnost, pluralism, social justice and internationalism," Rukh's platform calls for political and economic sovereignty (a sovereign Ukraine within a radically transformed union -- essentially, a Union of independent states), an end to decades of Russification in Ukraine, protection of the environment, and protection of the rights of national minorities and ethnic groups.

There were three main groupings at the Congress, mirroring the democratic opposition, and, to a degree, the population in Ukraine. The first, and most numerous, were mostly from western Ukraine and are clearly striving for an independent Ukraine. Many are members of the Ukrainian Helsinki Union. From eastern Ukraine, delegations consisted essentially of representatives of the coal miners' strike committees. They did not share in the nationalist fervor of the western Ukrainians. Although they share some concerns for greater political and cultural autonomy, their major focus is on improving economic conditions. The third group, mainly from Kiev, was the intelligentsia, many of them Communist Party members. They organized the conference and brought the disparate elements together. Their leaders include Ivan Drach, Volodymyr Yavorivsky and Dmytro Pavlychko, all reform-minded members of the Communist Party, as well as former political prisoner Mykhailo Horyn of the Ukrainian Helsinki Union.

Since the Congress, Rukh's popularity has risen considerably, making it a potent political force. On February 9, Rukh was permitted to register as a public organization. Buoyed by its relative success in the elections and growing prestige, Rukh seriously considered transforming itself into an opposition party -- one which would strive for an independent Ukraine -- but decided at a meeting held on March 24 in Khust to leave its current structure intact, permitting new parties of a democratic orientation to come under its wing.

### ***Other Independent Political Groups***

Among the leading informal groups with not only a cultural and environmental, but more overtly political, agenda are the Ukrainian Helsinki Union (UHU), which, with its unofficial journal *Visnyk* and frequent press releases, documents continuing instances of repression in Ukraine. The Ukrainian Helsinki Union is influential, especially within Rukh, and, because its leadership is largely made up of former political prisoners, carries considerable moral authority. The UHU has called for the transformation of the USSR into a confederation of independent states and is seriously considering transforming itself into a political party. Increasingly, some Ukrainian Helsinki Union (and Rukh) activists are calling for the establishment of a separate Ukrainian state, arguing that Ukraine's current difficulties are due to its status in a centralized state.

Other informal groups include the Ukrainian Democratic Union; the Ukrainian National Democratic League (UNDL); the Ukrainian Youth Association (SUM); Plast; the Association of Independent Ukrainian Youth (SNUM); the Ukrainian Students Union; the Ukrainian Democratic Peasants Union; and the Lev society. In addition, an Initiative Group to create a Peasant Democratic (Agrarian) Party was formed in March. Some informal groups have called for outright Ukrainian independence.

Two themes emerged from Helsinki Commission staff meetings with representatives of Rukh, the Ukrainian Helsinki Union and other informal groups: the advocacy of peaceful, democratic means for achieving the goal of a sovereign Ukraine, and the importance of cooperating with other nationalities residing within Ukraine's borders. Iosif Zisels, a leading Jewish activist and Rukh member, discussed attempts being made by him and other Rukh activists to organize an "assembly of nations" residing within Ukraine in order to resolve national questions. In a discussion with Commission staff, Rukh Secretary and Helsinki Union member Mykhailo Horyn stated that national minorities within Ukraine should "have full cultural autonomy" should they so desire.

### **The Democratic Bloc and Its Platform**

After the announcement of the November 1989 Ukrainian election law, over 40 opposition groups in Ukraine (including Rukh, the Ukrainian Helsinki Union, the Shevchenko Ukrainian Language Society, Green World, various strike committees and Ukrainian Catholic groups) met in Kiev and formed a loosely-structured Democratic bloc. At the meeting, participants agreed to coordinate the election campaign on the basis of a Rukh-proposed election manifesto.

The manifesto is noteworthy for its criticism of the Party and of the restructuring efforts in Ukraine. Its main priorities are:

- political and economic sovereignty for Ukraine.
- political pluralism and a multi-party system.
- the formation of an economic system for Ukraine on the basis of different forms of property ownership, including "individual" property, and a private and mixed economy.
- the free cultural and linguistic development of Ukrainians and all national minorities in Ukraine.
- the legalization of the Ukrainian Catholic and Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Churches.

### **The Communist Party of Ukraine and Its Platform**

The Communist Party of Ukraine continues to be unpopular, despite the September 1989 removal of its conservative leader, Vladimir Shcherbytsky. The growing demands for change, along with the deteriorating economic and environmental situation, continue to put the Party on the defensive. Even members of the conservative Party establishment understand that the old policies have been failures and are recognized as such by large segments of the population. The new Party Secretary, Volodymyr Ivashko, is more flexible. Ivashko, for example, supports Ukrainian sovereignty, but only within a federal system. Nevertheless, the rapid movement of reformist forces -- both inside and outside the Party -- is outpacing his push for change. The Party is especially defensive in light of the removal, due to public pressure, of Party leaders in several Ukrainian cities in the months leading up to the election. In mid-March, an Initiative Committee for the formation of an independent Ukrainian Communist Party was created.

Rukh's success in putting issues with deep popular support on the election agenda compelled the Party to adopt some of Rukh's positions in order to attract support. The Party's platform focused on the dismal economic situation, calling for a reallocation of resources from the defense sector into consumer goods production, and establishing more realistic prices for agricultural products. Politically, and perhaps most significantly, the Party platform advocated a politically sovereign Ukraine, but only within a renewed Soviet federation. Nevertheless, ideologically, the Party maintains its firm support for Marxist-Leninist principles. On the environmental front, the platform advocates a major cleanup in all large cities and calls for a new program of energy conservation. In the cultural sphere, Ukrainian art and literature are to be developed more intensively, and architectural and historical buildings are to be restored.



## ELECTIONS IN UKRAINE

### Right to Vote, Nominate Candidates and Campaign

The March 4 elections were the first multi-candidate (contested) elections in the history of Soviet Ukraine for positions in Ukraine. (In the spring of 1989, voters in the entire Soviet Union, including Ukraine, were able to choose among candidates for the USSR Congress of People's Deputies.) Prior to the 1990 elections, candidates were appointed almost exclusively from Communist Party ranks and ran without opposition.

The republic has been divided into 450 approximately equal electoral districts based on the territorial structure of the Ukrainian SSR. Each electoral district consists of an average of some 70,000 voters.

In addition to the candidates for the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet, thousands of elections for city, rural, *oblast* (25 geographic divisions named after the larger cities) and *rayons* (district) councils, or *rady*, were also held.

### *Features of November 1989 Ukrainian SSR Election Law*

The Ukrainian Government originally proposed to create a Congress of People's Deputies, which in turn would have selected the standing parliament (i.e., the Supreme Soviet). Following opposition, this plan was abandoned in favor of a directly-elected parliament. According to the basic principles of the law, elections of Ukrainian People's Deputies are held on the basis of universal (age 18 and over, with the exception of those declared incompetent because of mental illness or those in prison), equal (both sexes, one-person one-vote), and direct suffrage with secret voting. Elections are organized and conducted by electoral commissions from meetings of voters in their place of residence, military servicemen in their military units, and representatives of various collectives and social organizations. The Central Election Commission prepares and conducts elections of the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet, forms electoral districts, directs the activity of electoral commissions, distributes funds, resolves disputes, and conducts a variety of other functions connected with the election.

An initial draft election law, published in August before Shcherbytsky's ouster, called for a fixed number of Ukrainian Supreme Soviet seats to be reserved for members of the Communist Party, for potential candidates to be screened by electoral commissions as to their platforms, and for any number of candidates on the ballot (including only one).

After a public outcry against these and other undemocratic features, led by a group of deputies to the USSR Congress of People's Deputies from Ukraine (most of them also Rukh members), the draft was modified. In November 1989, the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet adopted many features of the alternative draft law, including:

- abandoning the Communist Party's quota of assured seats.
- removing the broadly worded provision that would have empowered election commissions to disqualify candidates whose platforms contradicted the USSR and Ukrainian Constitutions. Instead, only candidates who call for the use of force to overthrow the state can now be disqualified.

Features of the original draft which remain, however, despite opposition by democratic elements, include:

- the continued existence of the electoral commissions (Party controlled) which register candidates nominated by voters.
- rather than direct election of the chairman of the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet, the newly-elected Supreme Soviet will itself elect the chairman.
- agitation for boycotts will be punishable.

### *Election Timetable*

**Nominating Process:** Candidates were nominated from December 4 to January 4. According to the election law, candidates can be nominated in a variety of ways -- by work, professional and technical collectives, collectives at certain institutes of higher learning, registered public organizations, military units (i.e., military servicemen stationed within the electoral district, even if they normally reside outside Ukraine), and by meetings of voters from the district where at least 200 gather and nominate their candidate. A candidate needs half the participants in a meeting to vote for him in order to be nominated. In theory, then, if 200 inhabitants of an apartment complex from a district in Kiev hold a meeting and more than half vote to nominate a candidate, the nomination should be valid.

Candidates do not have to reside in the electoral district where they wish to run. Many Party officials ran in rural areas in which they did not reside and where they had a greater likelihood of winning. Similarly, several Democratic Bloc candidates from eastern Ukraine ran in the more nationally conscious western Ukraine, where their chances for winning were considerably higher.

**Registration:** The second phase of the electoral process took place from January 4 to February 4, within which time local state-appointed electoral commissions registered candidates who had been nominated and ruled on the legality of their nominations. Various documents, including minutes of nominating meetings, are required for registration.

**Campaign:** The last part of the process was the campaign itself, lasting from February 4 to March 3. On March 4, the actual balloting took place. In principle, all candidates are guaranteed access to premises and to the mass media. They may have up to five people help in conducting the campaign and have the right to free travel within the

electoral district (or, if they live outside, to and from their residence), and are released from their job duties.

***Election Day:*** Before the beginning of voting, the ballot boxes are inspected, sealed and stamped by the chairman of the district election commission. Ballots are issued by the district electoral commission "on the basis of the voter list of the electoral district when the voter presents his passport or other document certifying his identity" and the name is checked off the voter list. The voting is by ballot filled out by a voter in a booth or room by secret voting. Casting ballots for others is not allowed. Nobody except the voter is permitted to be present when the ballot is filled out. The voter crosses out on the ballot the names of the candidate deputies against whom he is voting. The ballot is dropped into the ballot box, which is only opened up by the district election commission after the commission chairman declares the polls to be closed. At that time, the ballot boxes are opened and all unutilized ballots are counted and destroyed by the district electoral commission. The commission establishes: the overall number of voters who participated in the voting, the number of votes cast for and against each prospective deputy; and the number of ballots declared invalid (i.e., non-standard ballots and ballots on which more than one candidate was not crossed out). Write-in votes are also not counted.

If on election day no candidate has at least 50 percent of the votes, run-off elections are held. If 50 percent of the electorate does not vote, the process must be repeated.

## **The Election Campaign -- in Practice**

### ***Nomination***

While the right to nominate in theory belongs to the meetings of voters, in practice such neighborhood gatherings must receive prior authorization -- by the very same local Party-dominated councils in whose interest it may be to keep a candidate from being nominated. Commission staff heard reports that these councils, at times, turned down or otherwise obstructed the voter meetings. In contrast, Party workers and bureaucrats were active in organizing nomination meetings at factories and enterprises, and as a result, many "technocrats" and managers loyal to the Party as well as Party officials were nominated and registered throughout the republic. Given its pervasive influence in all spheres of society, the Party had a built-in advantage.

Nevertheless, during the first phase of the campaign (December 4 - January 4), many of the Democratic Bloc's candidates were nominated both to the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet and to local councils (soviets). In western Ukraine, Democratic Bloc candidates were placed in every electoral district. In central and eastern Ukraine, about 40 percent of the electoral districts included Democratic Bloc candidates.

## *Registration*

According to Vitaliy Boyko, chairman of Ukraine's Central Election Commission, 3,653 candidates were registered for the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet -- an average of seven people for each seat, and one Kiev district had 33 candidates. Several hundred candidates dropped out before the elections.

According to the Ukrainian Central Election Commission, out of those candidates, 87 percent of the Supreme Soviet candidates were Party members. Some, however, were not part of the conservative Party apparatus and, indeed, relatively independent in their outlook. Other Party members are members of Rukh and were supported by the Democratic Bloc. Only 15.8 percent were workers or collective farmers, while a very high proportion were professionals or intellectuals (including over 100 writers). Women constituted a mere 7.5 percent of candidates, and only 4.4 percent were under 30 years of age.

Some officially registered organizations, such as the environmental group *Zeleny Svit*, (Green World) encountered difficulties in registering candidates. Candidates put forward by Green World and the Taras Shevchenko Ukrainian Language Society, including over 100 in Kiev alone, were denied registration. Rukh itself was unable to put forward candidates because it was registered as a public organization on February 9, after the period for registering candidates had expired.

According to many reports, electoral commissions refused to register other opposition candidates, especially in southern and eastern Ukraine. According to the Ukrainian Press Agency, the Democratic Bloc succeeded in registering only about one-third of its candidates in Ukraine, mostly in Kiev and western Ukraine. In late February, leading Rukh candidates Dmytro Pavlychko and Yuriy Shcherbak withdrew from the election, accusing local electoral commissions controlled by the Party of refusing to register many candidates of the Democratic Bloc. On February 25, one week before the elections, tens of thousands in Ukraine attended protest meetings.

Despite reports, carried even in the official press, of numerous violations by the electoral commissions, Democratic Bloc candidates were registered in 129 of the 450 electoral districts. Furthermore, there were Democratic Bloc supported candidates in an additional 72 districts for a total of 199. In western Ukraine and in Kiev, virtually every electoral district had a Democratic Bloc or bloc supported candidate.

Complaints by two public organizations -- *Zeleny Svit* and the Taras Shevchenko Ukrainian Language Society -- that several of their representatives had been refused registration were examined by the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet Presidium and the Central Election Commission. According to Vitaliy Boyko, only representatives "of primary organizations which did not have the status of *rayon* or *oblast* organizations failed to

receive registration." According to the Ukrainian election law, the right of nomination is granted only to organs of *oblast*, *rayon*, or city public organizations.

Boyko, however, did admit that "some constituency electoral commissions displayed formalism in the registration of candidate deputies." The Ukrainian Central Electoral Commission allowed the registration of 23 candidates refused on the local level, including four nominated by Green World and the Ukrainian Language Society.

In other instances, however, the Party-controlled electoral commissions did not appear to be investigating alleged violations of election laws although they are empowered to do so. Unfortunately, under the election law the courts have not been given an important role in settling such disputes. When a Democratic Bloc group, the Philosophy Society, filed a lawsuit in Odessa with the Procuracy concerning the rejection of its candidates for registration, the Procurator stated he had no power to force the electoral commission to register candidates.

### *Campaign*

*Access to Media, Campaign Literature, and Meetings:* The election law guarantees all candidates access to the media, an equal right to speak at pre-election and other meetings and gatherings, and equal access to the "material and technical means" for campaigning. Many non-Party candidates, especially outside western Ukraine, did not have nearly as much access to media and resources as did Party candidates. Many Party candidates took quickly to multi-media campaigning and made frequent television appearances. That medium was by-and-large out of the opposition's reach. Several candidates to the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet from Kiev, interviewed by Helsinki Commission staff, including election winners and losers, complained of less access to newspapers and radio and television than their Party opponents. One opposition candidate, for instance, indicated that he was only on the radio once, while his Party opponent was on TV "all the time." Furthermore, the Democratic Bloc election manifesto was not allowed to be published in the official press. It appeared through unofficial publications which, although they are growing rapidly, have a much more limited circulation than the official press.

Despite this disadvantage, Democratic Bloc candidates were able to get their message out to some extent in the more progressive official press. Oles Shevchenko, a former political prisoner and Ukrainian Helsinki Union member who won a seat in the new Ukrainian Supreme Soviet, was featured in two lengthy interviews in the Kiev newspaper *Moloda Gvardia*. Also, the level of access to the media by opposition candidates in western Ukraine was reported to have been more substantial than elsewhere.

Candidates also conveyed their campaign message through campaign literature, large public meetings, and meetings with individual voters. Campaign posters and leaflets of both Party and Democratic Bloc candidates were visible in Kiev during Helsinki

Commission staff's visit, although there were reports of Democratic Bloc posters and leaflets being removed or destroyed. The Commission staff also saw examples of defamatory, if not occasionally clumsy, leaflets against Democratic Bloc candidates in Kiev. Former political prisoner Evhen Proniuk, who narrowly lost his race, appeared to be a favorite target of these attacks.

The electoral commissions were responsible for organizing meetings between candidates and voters. Helsinki Commission staffers observed several pre-election meetings on the eve of the March 18 run-off elections. From all appearances, these took place in an open environment in which even the most controversial topics were discussed. Commission staff also witnessed candidates in the subway stations of Kiev freely addressing passersby through a loudspeaker as well as Kievites debating issues and merits of candidates near Lenin's statue. On the other hand, on March 14, Oles Shevchenko was informed by the Central Election Commission that a court case was being prepared against him for addressing a February 20 "unsanctioned meeting."

## **ELECTION DAY -- BALLOTING AND RESULTS**

### **Balloting**

The Helsinki Commission staff visited two polling places in two separate districts in Kiev on March 18, the day of the run-off elections. One was located in the headquarters of the Central Election Commission. At both polling stations there were, in addition to the candidates' representatives, independent observers. Earlier that day, Rukh activists in at least three polling places had been informed that, according to a telegram from the Head of the Central Election Commission Vitaliy Boyko, independent observers from outside the electoral district would not be allowed. After protests from Rukh, this decision was quickly reversed by an official of the republic Supreme Soviet.

At both polling places, according to election officials, close to the required 50 percent of the electorate had voted by mid-day. Each polling place was equipped with ballot boxes and curtained-off voting booths. The polling places were easily identifiable. Voters entered the polling place and presented passports. Their names were checked off on the voters list and they were given ballots and a pencil. They entered the voting booths, where they were to cross out the names of all candidates except for the one they were voting for. After voting, voters came out of the other side of the booths and dropped the ballots into sealed boxes placed there. Each polling place was staffed by about a dozen members of the electoral commission who had been nominated by various collectives, social organizations, and "meetings of voters," as well as several representatives of the candidate (known as "trusted persons").

Helsinki Commission staff witnessed and were told of numerous problems with voting procedures. These fell into two categories: procedures that were legal but raised questions of control and procedures apparently counter to law. In the former category, Commission staff were told that poll workers had been told to check off voters in pencil, not pen. Also, staff observed the following voting procedure for invalids: election officials carried ballots and ballot boxes to apartments. Finally, Democratic Bloc activists reported that military maneuvers had been scheduled for the run-off weekend so as to increase the "conservative" vote.

In the category of actual violations, Democratic Bloc observers claimed to have witnessed people being given multiple ballots and voting without passports or sufficient identification. Helsinki Commission staff spoke with one observer who earlier that day had attempted to photograph an alleged violation and had his roll of film exposed by the militia. He was told that only press was allowed to take photos. In the other polling location, however, Commission staff were permitted to take pictures.

Numerous other instances of insufficient controls or violations on the part of electoral commissions were reported by Democratic Bloc observers both in the March 4 elections and the March 18 run-off elections. In at least several districts, election leaflets belonging to the Party were put up on the day of elections, although the campaign law states that no campaigning is to be conducted on election day. In other districts during the March 4 election, Rukh officials claimed that ballots had been destroyed or had been filled in before the voting officially began. Observers in one suburban district reported that on March 4, after balloting had ended, a preliminary vote count turned up 40 more ballots than names on the district roll. Representatives of the election commission arrived, and after their recount, counted 400 fewer ballots than voters. In many districts there were also reports of voters voting for individuals other than themselves, especially family members, an apparently not uncommon practice in previous Soviet elections.

In other electoral districts, candidates' representatives reported that heads of electoral commissions were extremely unforthcoming and even rude, that numerous ballots had been distributed to voters without any identification, that election "helpers" in the voting place were suggesting to voters for whom they should vote, and that pencils were being used instead of pens. In at least several districts, ballots ran out -- in one case at 2 p.m. (According to the election law, voting hours were supposed to be held from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m., until all voters on the list had voted, which was rarely the case.) Still other observers complained about not being permitted to be present at the ballot counting. Also, there were reports that early on March 18, military units were used to paste up posters supporting Party candidates.

During a meeting at the Central Electoral Commission with Helsinki Commission staff, Svetlana Yevtushenko of the electoral board admitted that problems exist and that people still are not used to making choices and voting. She also noted that the election

law is not perfect and that new questions are coming up all the time, although "in comparison with what we had, it is very democratic." Yevtushenko said that as of March 18, some 400 written complaints had come in about election irregularities as well as an unspecified number of telephone calls.

## Results

For the first round of elections on March 4, predicted voter apathy did not materialize as a reported 37,264,666 people, or 84 percent of the electorate, turned out in the republic to choose among the over 3,000 candidates running for seats in the new Supreme Soviet.

Two-thirds of the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet candidates were unable to win the required 50 percent plus one of the vote and faced run-off elections on March 18. According to the election law, in multi-candidate races where no candidate won the required 50 percent, the two candidates who received the highest number of votes automatically move into the run-offs. A majority is not required to win the run-offs -- the candidate receiving the most votes wins as long as 50 percent of the electorate in a given district votes. In fact, only 112 of the 450 seats in the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet were filled following the March 4 elections. Candidates for the 331 that were unfilled included leaders of the Communist Party, among them Ukrainian Party Secretary Ivashko. In Kiev, all but one of 22 districts had to hold run-off elections due to the large number of candidates running for each position. All but one of the 21 run-off contests featured Communist Party and Democratic Bloc candidates.

There were Democratic Bloc candidates in 199 of the 450 electoral districts; despite complaints about election irregularities, they won in 43 of the 112 elections that were decided in the first round. Democratic Bloc candidates from the two western Ukrainian *oblasts* of Lviv and Ivano-Frankivsk took the overwhelming majority of seats in the first round March 4 elections, many winning landslide victories. In Lviv, Democratic Bloc candidates, including several former political prisoners and Ukrainian Helsinki Union activists, won landslide victories. Among the winners are former political prisoners and Ukrainian Helsinki Union members Vyacheslav Chornovil, Bohdan Horyn, Mykhailo Horyn in Lviv, and Levko Lukianenko and Bohdan Rebryk in Ivano-Frankivsk. The Chairman of Rukh, poet Ivan Drach, was elected in Lviv and Rukh leader Volodymyr Yavorivsky, also a member of the USSR Congress of People's Deputies, was elected in Kirovohrad.

During the March 18 run-off elections, Democratic Bloc candidates scored further victories. In Kiev, they won 15 of the 21 contested seats. Among the victors were Oles Shevchenko of the Ukrainian Helsinki Union, Rukh activists Pavlo Movchan, Serhiy Holovaty, and Larysa Skoryk, and theater director Les Tanyuk. Rukh activists told Helsinki Commission staff that two additional Democratic Bloc candidates, Evhen Pronyuk and Oles Serhiyenko, would have won if not for strong Party efforts to discredit them



through slanderous leaflets and posters which had appeared on the eve and morning of the elections. Also, Rukh activists claimed that the votes of soldiers present for military maneuvers during that particular weekend could have made a difference in two elections, including that of Party Secretary Volodymyr Ivashko, who received 30,000 votes to Democratic Bloc rival Oleksiy Kvas's 22,000.

In central Ukraine, about 10 to 20 percent of the seats went to the Democratic Bloc. In Sumy on the Russian border, both candidates from the Democratic Bloc won. In Kharkov, according to a Radio Liberty report quoting one of the democratic candidates, "local authorities blatantly violated democratic procedures and used illegal methods to prevent democratic candidates from being elected." When one campaign assistant went to vote, for instance, he found that his vote had already been cast. Nevertheless, one Democratic Bloc candidate and former political prisoner Genrikh Altunyan emerged a victor, while another former political prisoner, Ihor Kravtsiv, whose platform included calls for an independent Ukrainian army, lost by five votes out of 55,000 cast.

In the more Russified eastern and southern Ukraine, Democratic Bloc candidates did poorly, winning approximately 20 out of 148 seats. However, many deputies representing the wishes of workers' strike committees were elected in the heavily industrialized Donbas region.

In Lviv *oblast*, all five contested Supreme Soviet seats were won by Democratic Bloc candidates. Indeed, in the Galician area of western Ukraine, which includes the Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk and Ternopil *oblasts*, the Democratic Bloc won 43 out of 47 seats.

In all, over 110 Democratic Bloc candidates won seats in the new Ukrainian Supreme Soviet. They also scored victories on the *oblast* and local level in much of western Ukraine and took a majority of the city council of Kiev.

According to Moscow radio, in all, 442 out of 450 deputies were elected. Approximately 375 are members or candidate members of the Communist Party. The deputies include 331 Ukrainians, 99 Russians, five Belorussians, four Jews, one Bulgarian, one Armenian and one German. Thirteen women have won seats in the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet.

Although the Party apparatus had a clear advantage, a number of factors proved to be advantageous for the Democratic Bloc and other independent candidates:

- Much stronger anti-Party sentiments in Ukraine in recent months, especially with revelations of cases of abuse of official positions. In several cities, local Party leaderships were removed.

- Growing independence within Communist Party ranks, especially in western Ukraine.
- The recent CPSU Central Committee's plenum decision to end the leading role of the Party.

## **POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE ELECTIONS**

### **Within Ukraine**

Within Ukraine, election results will shape politics to a considerable degree because of the following factors:

- The growth of the legislature as an institution. The devolution of powers to the republic level makes all republic Supreme Soviets key institutions. In November 1989, the current Ukrainian Supreme Soviet gave itself much broader decision-making powers: acts of the USSR Council of Ministers and all-Union ministries or departments can be "suspended" if they conflict with Ukrainian law; the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet will make decisions on environmental matters; and it empowered itself to make decisions regarding the opening of consulates and the establishment of diplomatic, international and trade representation.
- The end of the Party monopoly of power. Without this development, the existence of other political parties would have been almost irrelevant. Now, however, their presence in the Soviet Union will both speed the pace of the Communist Party's decline and spur them to become a more serious and government-oriented opposition. Significantly, there is also discussion of forming an independent Ukrainian Communist Party.

The new Ukrainian Supreme Soviet, with the presence of the Democratic Bloc and other independent deputies and under pressure from an increasingly restless public, will be compelled to make strides towards greater democracy and decentralization of the economic and political structure in order to gain the confidence of the public. While Rukh decided on March 25 not to transform itself into a party but to act as an umbrella for democratically oriented parties and independent groups, there are other parties forming, including a Green Party and a Peasants Democratic (Agrarian) Party. It is also likely that the influential Ukrainian Helsinki Union intends to form a party when it meets in late April.

The Democratic Bloc has managed, within a relatively short period of time and with, by Western standards, limited resources, to become a formidable opponent to the Communist Party. Taking into account that Rukh only held its founding Congress in

September 1989 and the Democratic Bloc was formed only in November, the results of the election are impressive. Although the Democratic Bloc won only one-fourth of the seats to the new Supreme Soviet, it is clear that it set the agenda for the elections. This agenda is becoming an increasingly popular one and the Party, recognizing this, took up some Rukh positions in order to attract support. Rukh and its Democratic Bloc allies are pushing society at large and the Communist Party in a progressive direction, and doing so at a pace that few would have anticipated as recently as a year ago.

The Democratic Bloc's influence will soon be felt in the new Ukrainian Supreme Soviet. And, given the current pace of change, it is probable that issues such as an independent foreign policy and an independent Ukrainian army will come up in the not too distant future.

### **Implications for the Soviet Union**

The primary issue appearing on the Democratic Bloc's agenda, then, is the question of Ukraine's relationship with the rest of the Soviet Union. With the emergence of multiple parties, it is likely that there will be even greater pressure for Ukrainian self-determination leading to independence. Valuable experience and confidence were gained from the elections, when the Democratic Bloc functioned, to some extent, as a party, although it did not have equal access to the media (instead, it relied on about 100 independent newsletters and other publications).

The question of the relationship with Moscow may threaten to split the democratic movement. While Rukh's stated position is not in favor of immediate independence, there is rapidly growing sentiment for eventual independence (i.e., leaving the USSR), especially within the Ukrainian Helsinki Union and among groups based in western Ukraine. This sentiment will almost certainly continue to grow, especially if the economic situation continues to deteriorate.

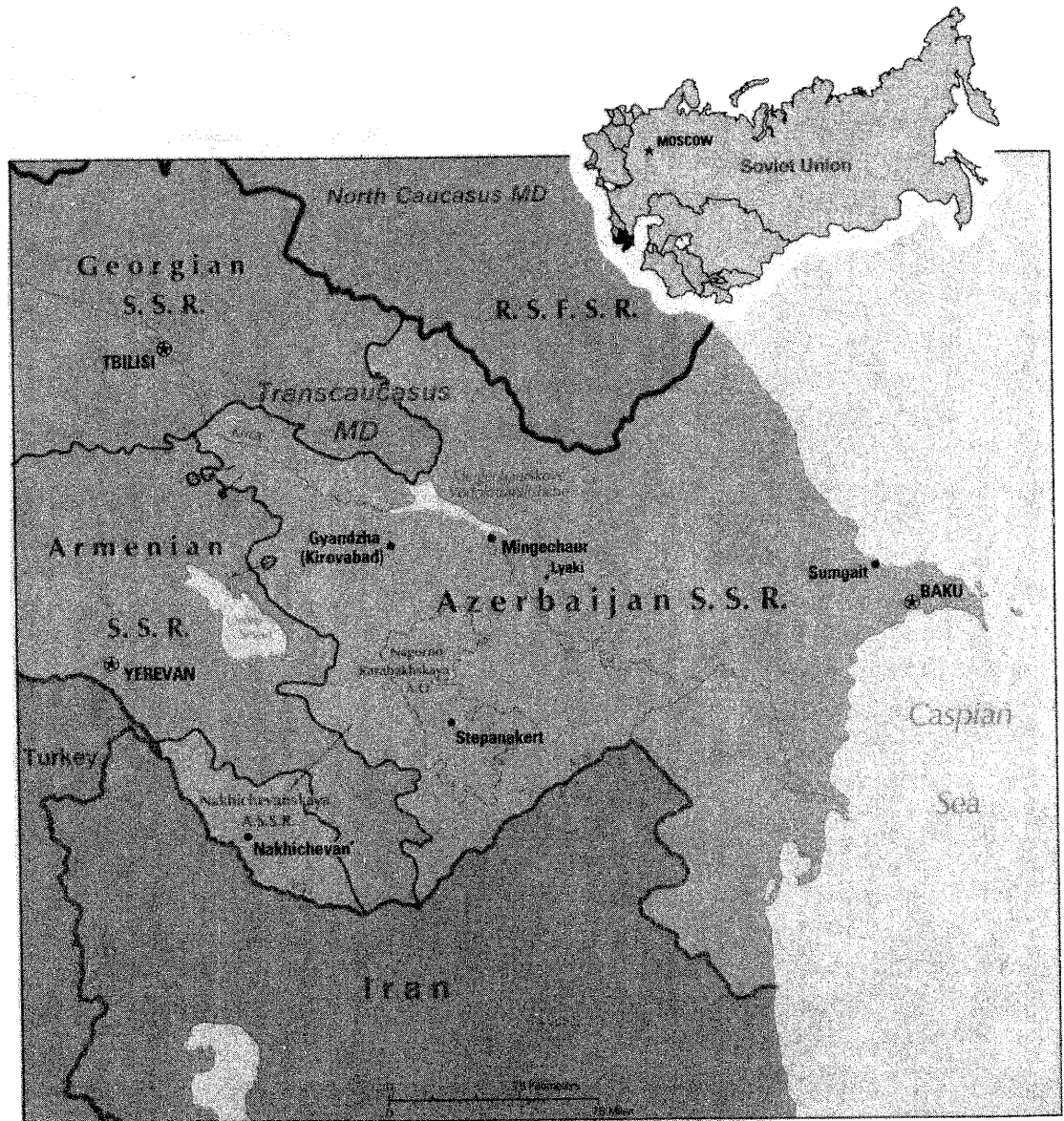
Admittedly, this scenario does not take into account the rapidly evolving Lithuanian situation. A crackdown there could have a chilling affect on the independence movement. Conversely, it could radicalize the population. The democratic movement categorically rejects violence as a means of attaining its goals, and there appears to be support for a step-by-step approach and a recognition by the majority that too rapid moves towards independence could lead to violent repression.

Clearly, Ukrainian independence would pose a special problem for the Soviet leadership, since without Ukraine the Soviet Union's power would be significantly diminished. It is hard to imagine Moscow letting go of Ukraine without a major confrontation. Given this reality, Ukraine probably will not leave the USSR in the near future and would not sever all its links to its neighbors, especially Russia. Instead, newly-elected democratic forces in the republic Supreme Soviet, at least in the near-term, will promote

the formation of a new Union composed of equal, sovereign states on the basis of a treaty. It will also almost certainly give impetus to the Kremlin to draft a new Union Treaty which would give more genuine power to the republics. Therefore, the importance of these elections transcends Ukraine itself and will have far-reaching implications both within and outside Soviet borders.

# REPORT ON THE SEPTEMBER 30, 1990 SUPREME SOVIET ELECTIONS IN AZERBAIJAN

## Baku, Azerbaijan



October 25, 1990

*This report is based on the findings of a Helsinki Commission staff delegation to Baku, Azerbaijan, from September 27 through October 2, 1990. Among those the delegation interviewed were representatives of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan, Azerbaijani Supreme Soviet officials, the chairman of the Central Election Commission, secretaries of the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry, spokesmen for the Azerbaijani Popular Front, the Social Democrats, the Ecological Union, the Republican Independent Party, and various independent candidates.*

\* \* \*

## SUMMARY

- On September 30, 1990, the first multi-party elections to the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan took place. There was never any doubt, given the circumstances of the election, that the communists would gain control of the legislature; the question was whether non-communist groups, many of whom had joined the "Democratic Azerbaijan" coalition, would win any seats. Though the final figures are not yet in, non-communist forces led by the Azerbaijani Popular Front have for the first time won some representation in parliament.
- The elections took place in a state of emergency, which has been in effect since January 1990, when the Soviet military entered Baku in force. Non-communist groups argued that holding free and fair elections under such conditions was impossible and claimed that the authorities maintained the state of emergency in order to facilitate rigging the election's outcome.
- The elections were marred by allegations of widespread fraud and intimidation. Even the Communist Party-controlled media in Azerbaijan carried detailed reports of chicanery, ranging from refusal to register non-communist candidates during the campaign to stuffing ballot boxes on election day. Post-election reportage on central Soviet television from Moscow also publicized these improprieties. The most serious abuses, according to unofficial sources, concerned the murder of at least two opposition candidates.
- Colonel Valery Buniatov, the military commandant of Baku, closed the city from September 26 to October 2 to non-residents in an attempt to keep out election observers invited by non-communist groups. Soviet troops met would-be election monitors, including members of the Moscow and Leningrad city soviets, at the airport and sent them home. Nevertheless, Helsinki Commission staff and a representative of the U.S. Embassy in Moscow were permitted to go to Baku. They encountered no difficulties in meeting with Communist Party and government officials, as well as with representatives of non-communist organizations.
- Run-off and repeat elections will be necessary before the new Azerbaijani Supreme Soviet can convene. When it does, prospects for cooperation between the communist majority and the non-communist opposition are unclear because the Popular Front has called for the non-recognition of what it sees as a fraudulently elected legislature. Whatever the ultimate balance of forces in the Supreme Soviet, all those interviewed agreed that developments in the ongoing conflict with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh

will have a decisive influence on the parliament's future activity. Within that context, the crucial items on the legislative docket will include: legal guarantees of Azerbaijan's political and economic sovereignty and rewriting the republic's constitution in that spirit; the deliberations in Moscow on a new Treaty of Union and voting on whatever proposal emerges from those negotiations; moving towards a market economy; dealing with the refugee problem in Azerbaijan; and establishing independent relations with other Soviet republics and with countries outside the USSR.



## THE POLITICAL BACKGROUND

### Introduction

After long delays and one official postponement, the elections to the Azerbaijani Supreme Soviet finally went off as planned on September 30. The late date of the Azerbaijani election reflects the region-wide instability in Transcaucasia: voters in Armenia chose their legislature only on May 20 and Georgia's elections (the last ones scheduled) took place on October 28, having been postponed from March. Nevertheless, the atmosphere in Azerbaijan was peculiarly charged, even by today's Soviet standards. Azerbaijan was the only Soviet republic to hold its Supreme Soviet elections with its capital city, Baku, and other regions, such as the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO), in a state of emergency. This dubious distinction indicates the level of unresolved tensions in Azerbaijan as well as the determination of the central authorities in Moscow, abetted by the Communist Party of Azerbaijan (CPA), to keep tight reins on this strategically and economically vital republic.

Moscow and the Azerbaijani communists had good reason to fear losing control of Azerbaijan at the end of 1989. Against the backdrop of Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, public activism in Azerbaijan has reached new heights in the last two years. Of the many political organizations that have emerged, the Azerbaijani Popular Front (APF) is the best known and most influential. Founded in July 1989 ostensibly to promote perestroika, the APF rapidly gained strength as it led demonstrations and strikes throughout Azerbaijan. Charging the Party with caving to Moscow's dictates on NKAO and falsifying the March 1989 USSR Supreme Soviet elections, the APF demanded the restoration of Azerbaijani control in NKAO--then under Moscow's administration--and pressed for democratic elections in Azerbaijan. Under intense APF pressure, the republic legislature in September 1989 declared Azerbaijan's sovereignty and the APF appeared poised to win a stunning victory in the republic's Supreme Soviet elections, planned for early 1990.

The power struggle came to a head at year's end and it did not take the form of an electoral contest. As popular emotions swelled in the fall, the movement increasingly split into moderate and more radical wings, with the former exerting ever less influence on the latter. In December, radical factions of the APF took over Communist Party headquarters in various cities, such as Lenkoran. Assaults on Soviet institutions included the destruction of border installations between the USSR and Azerbaijani-populated northern Iran, accompanied by mass border crossings in both directions. With Soviet authority in Azerbaijan seemingly on the verge of vanishing, the emergence of an APF-led government was prevented only by the "January events."

Worsening Azerbaijani-Armenian tensions in Baku, stoked by the influx of Azerbaijani refugees from Armenia and news of intensified fighting around the border

regions, provided the immediate background for the inter-ethnic violence that broke out on January 13. A large demonstration in Baku organized by opposition forces degenerated into an anti-Armenian pogrom, which lasted until January 15. APF spokesmen portray the pogrom as a deliberate Soviet-orchestrated provocation, designed to create a pretext for what ensued: during the night of January 19, Soviet troops entered Baku in force, and according to official accounts, killed 170 persons and wounded about 400. In subsequent days, many APF activists and others were arrested. The state of emergency in Baku that Mikhail Gorbachev ordered on January 19 remains in effect and armed personnel carriers stand guard in Lenin Square to this day.

Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze claimed that the army's goal was to prevent any more anti-Armenian pogroms, but it is widely agreed that the pogrom had by then run its course. Defense Minister Yazov offered a different perspective: charging that the APF was conspiring to seize power, he stated that Moscow had sent troops into Baku to reassert Soviet control over Azerbaijan. Mikhail Gorbachev justified the decision to use military force with allusions to both of these arguments, and also invoked the image of Azerbaijan on the brink of rule by Islamic fundamentalism.

In Azerbaijan, widespread rage over the deaths of civilians at the hands of Soviet soldiers has engendered deep bitterness towards Moscow, which Helsinki Commission staff heard expressed by Party and government spokesmen, representatives of unofficial groups and ordinary people. But Azerbaijanis also fault the West, for failing to protest Soviet behavior in Baku that, they argue, it would roundly have condemned in Vilnius. Consequently, when voters went to the polls on September 30, their mood was variously described as apathetic, bitter, resigned, cowed, tired, and angry.

At stake in the September 30 elections were not only seats in the republic legislature but in city, county and rural soviets. This report, however, deals only with the Supreme Soviet election.

### **The Political Landscape**

The election battle essentially pitted the Communist Party of Azerbaijan against the non-communist opposition led by the APF. Bolstered by the presence of Soviet troops and protected by the state of emergency, the Party had regained its control of the local levers of power and influence, if not its legitimacy. With the explosion of sovereignty declarations all over the USSR in 1990 widening the bounds of the permissible, the Party emphasized its resolve to achieve full political and economic sovereignty, while portraying itself as alone capable of ensuring stability and improving the material well-being of the population.

Between January and September 1990, by contrast, the Popular Front's stock had fallen: several hundred of its activists were in prison; the movement was riven by divisions

and recriminations over the tragedy in Baku; and the public's enthusiasm for political engagement had waned. Nevertheless, the APF retains much public support and joined with other opposition groups to contest the Party's grip on the legislature.

On July 8, approximately 50 non-communist groups coalesced in an electoral bloc called "Democratic Azerbaijan." The bloc included, among others, the APF, the National Democratic (New Mussavat) Party, the Democratic Union of the Azerbaijani Intelligentsia, Liberal-Democrats, ecological parties, the republic's Council of Elders (Aksakals), the "January 20" Group, the Karabakh Relief Committee, and refugee organizations. Participating movements united around a platform of three basic priority planks: political and economic sovereignty for Azerbaijan; human rights; and economic and political pluralism. "Democratic Azerbaijan" originally threatened to boycott the elections if the authorities failed to meet its demands for new election laws, release of all political prisoners, and an end to military control in Baku, but eventually decided to take part anyway.

Originally set for September 2, the Supreme Soviet elections were delayed until September 30. Azerbaijani officials explain the postponement as a concession to APF arguments that the election law allotted too little time to campaign. An APF source, however, claimed the Party put the date off when it became clear that it needed more time to rig the elections.

This dispute reflects the state of relations between the communist authorities and the non-communist opposition. Spokesmen for both sides agreed that the chasm between them has remained deep. For example, noticeably absent in Azerbaijan was the intermingling between reformist Party members and Popular Fronts that characterized the situation in the Baltic States. An initiative launched in the spring of 1990 to convoke a roundtable embracing Party and opposition forces foundered when, according to APF spokesmen, the Party ceased to show any interest in the proceedings. By forging the "Democratic Azerbaijan" bloc, therefore, the opposition was trying to present voters with a very clear choice.

### **Nagorno-Karabakh and the Elections**

The conflict with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh played a pervasive but indirect role in the Azerbaijani elections. The state of emergency remains in effect ostensibly because of the continuing armed confrontations across the border (although one official asserted that the state of emergency was needed to dash APF hopes of seizing power by force) and prospects for resolving the dispute color visions of the future for all Azerbaijanis, official and unofficial. Moreover, the APF continues to charge the Party with not defending forcefully enough the Azerbaijani position, while simultaneously accusing the authorities of using Nagorno-Karabakh as an excuse not to address other pressing issues, such as democratization, sovereignty or economic reform. Several Party

Georgia's election law mandated restrictions on both running for office and voting. Ten years' residence in the republic was a prerequisite to standing for election. Soldiers or individuals serving in paramilitary formations not under Georgian jurisdiction could not vote.

In a clear attempt to limit the influence of non-Georgian secessionist groups, the law barred from participation any political parties that advocate violence, ethnic hatred or the violation of Georgia's territorial integrity. This restriction alone would have sufficed to preclude the provision's intended targets, the Abkhaz Popular Front and Southern Ossetia's Ademon Nykhas. Apparently as added insurance, however, the law also stipulated that only political parties, organizations and movements whose action extends all over Georgia had the right to field candidates.

### **The Central Election Commission (CEC)**

The old Georgian Supreme Soviet appointed the chairman of the CEC and four other members. Afterwards, every registered party had the right to appoint a member to the CEC. Commission members then elected the deputy chairmen and secretary.

The Central Election Commission carried out its responsibilities in the full glare of publicity: newspapers carried almost daily reports of its meetings, activities and decisions. Such reports also publicized organizational shortcomings. For instance, the October 6 issue of *Zarya Vostoka* reported that the CEC had discussed delays in distributing campaign money to parties, blocs and candidates (see **Complaints** below).

The principle of staffing election commissions with representatives of all registered parties also applied to district and precinct levels. Spokesmen of Georgian parties, as well as foreign observers (see below), agreed that this practice was not only democratic but a highly effective guard against fraud. Authorized agents of candidates had the right to attend sessions of electoral commissions, as did representatives of parties and blocs, social organizations, reporters, and foreign observers.

### **Nomination and Registration of Candidates**

Parties had to be registered with the Central Election Commission to nominate candidates. Each party and electoral bloc could put up one party list of at least 125 and not more than 250 candidates. After registering their lists, parties and blocs could nominate one candidate for each electoral district. If the withdrawal of candidacies left fewer than 125 candidates on a party list, it was removed. Of the contending parties and blocs, only Round Table-Free Georgia and the Georgian Communist Party presented 250 candidates. As for contests organized along majoritarian lines, in which each party could field one candidate per district, the Round Table and the GCP again nominated the most candidates, 121 and 120, respectively. Groups of 500 people could also nominate

candidates in majoritarian elections, but voters could give their support to only one candidate.

According to a CEC spokesman, 40 parties applied for registration, 29 of which were registered. The CEC rejected the others for not complying with the requirements of the election law, such as having a platform distinct from that of other parties, or if their list of candidates fell below the required minimum of 125. Parties had three days to appeal registration denials to the Georgian Supreme Court, which had to return a ruling within three days. Eight of the eleven parties whose applications were denied did appeal and the Supreme Court in six of the eight cases overturned the CEC's denial.

The best known such instance concerned the "Stalin" party, which plans to create a "universal communist party." Georgia's CEC rejected the party's registration application on the grounds that it did not have its own program, i.e., it followed the program and statutes of the CPSU, and that "Stalin" did not recognize those sections of Georgia's constitution not based on Marxism-Leninism, such as the introduction of a multi-party system. "Stalin" appealed to the Georgian Supreme Court, which ruled that it could participate in the elections. This decision led to a hunger strike by lecturers and students at Tbilisi State University. On October 19, the Supreme Court reversed itself and barred "Stalin" from the elections.

### **Districting**

The former Georgian Supreme Soviet had 440 seats, which the Central Election Commission decided to cut to 250. This change necessitated major redistricting, because the mixed proportional-majoritarian election system meant that 250 seats actually required only 125 electoral districts. Each of Georgia's 49 administrative rayons (counties) received at least one district, and could then get more, depending on population. District electoral commissions working with local soviets then divided these electoral districts into precincts.

### **Funding**

The election law obligated the state to cover the expenses of the election. Parties, electoral blocs and individual candidates could establish their own funds, as long as they did not exceed by four times the total allotted by the CEC for each party, bloc, or independent candidate.

### **Access to Media**

Georgia's election law mandated the press to publish materials submitted by electoral commissions, such as the election programs of parties, blocs and independent candidates. Georgian newspapers did, indeed, publish the election platforms of the parties and blocs, as well as interviews with their leading representatives. Naturally, since the

Communist Party controlled these newspapers, a reader could learn more about individual candidates nominated by the GCP than about independents, but the local print media contained a good deal of information about all competing parties and blocs.

The Central Election Commission also used radio and television on a daily basis to publicize the latest information on the election. After parties were registered, Georgian television broadcast shows called "The First Multi-Party Elections in Georgia," in which a journalist spoke to representatives of the parties. Subsequently, the CEC gave each party and bloc 20 minutes of television time for about two weeks, until election eve.

### **Running for Office**

Candidates could not run under different party lists. They could not simultaneously run on a party list and as an independent candidate, or in more than one electoral district.

Registered candidates could receive their average wage while campaigning. The election law guaranteed them the right to speak at meetings and use the media. Electoral commissions were to provide them with offices and meeting places, and publish their campaign posters: one poster for every 100 voters but at least 500 for independent candidates, and 50,000 posters of one type for parties and electoral blocs.

Parties and blocs that submitted lists of candidates could have in each district an authorized agent to represent their interests vis-a-vis the state, public bodies, voters and electoral commissions. Independent candidates could have ten such representatives in their district. One authorized agent in each district could continue to receive his average wage during the campaign.

### **Observers**

A special feature of the Georgian Supreme Soviet elections was the effort made by Georgia's Central Election Commission to solicit the participation of foreign observers. Part of the CEC agenda, it might be suspected, was to discredit the elections to the National Congress held a month earlier by groups boycotting the Supreme Soviet elections. Whatever the motives, the CEC went to great lengths to ensure that observers were well treated. Over 40 monitors, mostly from Western Europe and the United States, accepted the CEC's invitation. The CEC provided transportation and, when necessary, hotel accommodations to foreign observers who wished to travel to areas far from Tbilisi, such as Abkhazia, and remain there overnight for the vote-counting. Anticipating wide interest in the election, the CEC also set up a press center in a Tbilisi hotel, where it held press conferences and made available printed materials for reporters and observers.

## Complaints

Georgian opposition parties did not complain about the election law, which they had helped craft; rather, they alleged that the GCP had violated the law and tried to rig the election. Some non-Georgian parties, however, characterized the election law as discriminatory and urged their supporters to boycott the election.

At a Central Election Commission press conference on October 27, Zviad Gamsakhurdia announced that "the official authorities" were trying to sabotage the election and asked monitors for help in annulling the results in case of threats, violence or fraud. He charged that communist leaders were trying to buy votes by providing constituents with scarce goods, such as butter, eggs and sugar. He added that such tactics were especially widespread in rural areas, where doctors, for example, were pressuring patients to vote for the GCP.

Gamsakhurdia stressed that many people had not received invitations to vote from their precinct electoral commissions, a complaint echoed by other candidates at the press conference. The deputy chairman of the CEC, Tengiz Sigua, responded that the election law permitted voting without an invitation. He said that the CEC would ask leaders of political parties to inform the public on television that only a passport was needed to vote. Asked who was responsible for the shortage of invitations, Sigua replied that they were printed in facilities owned by the GCP.

Spokesmen of political parties also complained at the press conference that many ballots were already in circulation. Sigua acknowledged the charge and conceded the danger of ballot-stuffing. He explained that a special session of the CEC had decided to instruct members of precinct election commissions, where voting would take place, to sign the back of each ballot before handing it to a voter. Unsigned ballots would not be valid and each ballot would be checked by election observers, thus preventing any possibility of fraud. Sigua diplomatically answered questions about who was behind this apparent attempt to rig the election by noting that only the GCP controlled printing facilities.

The chairman of the Social Democrats complained about the Communist Party's publishing advantages. Since only the GCP had registered press organs and printing facilities, he contended that the election was not really a multi-party election, even if it was clearly not a one-party election.

Representatives of all parties asserted at the press conference that they had received no CEC money to cover their campaign expenses, in contravention of the election law. This particular charge was striking, considering the large amount of money the CEC spent on the election and an October 6 *Zarya Vostoka* account of CEC efforts to address delays in distributing funds to candidates and parties. According to the report, arrangements had been made to open special accounts in local banks in all 125 districts.

In registering their dissatisfaction with aspects of the campaign, candidates could not ignore the violence and instances of intimidation that had taken place. Zviad Gamsakhurdia alleged that attempts had been made on his life and that one of his bodyguards had been killed. He also characterized the October 26 shooting of National Democratic Party leader Gia Chanturia as a provocation by "forces who do not want the election to take place." In fact, as mentioned above, Chanturia accused Gamsakhurdia himself of being behind the shooting.

The leader of the Social Democrats told Helsinki Commission staff about threats received by three Social Democratic candidates, who were warned to withdraw their candidacies. One of them, whose house was attacked and who was told that he would be killed and his daughter raped, did eventually leave the race.

Non-Georgian parties, such as the Abkhaz Popular Front, denied the fairness of the election law. They argued that the ban on parties whose activity did not extend all over Georgia and which did not respect Georgian territorial integrity deprived non-Georgians of the right to put forward candidates. Members of Ademon Nykhas in Tskhinvali, capital of the Southern Ossetian Autonomous Oblast, made the same claims to Helsinki Commission staff. As a result, both groups complained, only the Communist Party could represent them on party lists and they said they would refuse to recognize the mandate of anyone elected from their districts.

Various people in the Azerbaijani-populated district of Marneuli informed American election observers that communist officials had pressured them to vote for the GCP during the campaign. Such efforts usually targeted less educated voters, who, before voting, were told that the Party would know how they had voted, or who were simply told in polling places to vote for the GCP. One individual who resisted such pressure was not permitted to vote and was also prevented from meeting with American election observers.

One unusual and interesting complaint about the election was registered by the Central Election Commission itself. As mentioned above, Gia Chanturia was wounded on October 26; on election eve, his supporters stormed into the central television studio and accused Zviad Gamsakhurdia over the air of responsibility for the shooting. The CEC claimed that the broadcast constituted a violation of the election law.

## **THE BALLOTING AND RESULTS**

### **Voting**

On election day, Helsinki Commission staff traveled with one member of an American Bar Association delegation of election monitors. They observed the proceedings at several polling places in Tbilisi, then set out for Gori, Josef Stalin's birthplace, visiting



along the way the city of Mtskheta and the village of Natakhtari. On the way back to Tbilisi, they stopped at a polling place on a *kolkhoz* (collective farm) in the village of Kheltubani.

As voter lists had already been compiled for the aborted March elections, they only had to be verified for the October balloting. Voter rolls included all Georgian citizens residing permanently in Georgia, 18 years or older, who lived in a given electoral precinct when the lists were compiled. Voters who had changed their address would receive a certificate from their former precinct electoral commission and they would be added to supplementary voter rolls in their new precinct on election day.

Elections were considered valid if over one half of the total number of voters in the district participated. Run-offs were held if elections were valid but no candidate got over one half of the votes.

Voting took place from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. According to the election law, ballots were in Georgian and, when necessary, in another language, depending on the language of the local population. In fact, American election observers learned that in some Azerbaijani-populated districts, only Georgian-language ballots were available, which local voters could not read. Ballots were plain and colored, for the proportional and majoritarian contests. One listed competing parties and blocs in the order in which they submitted their lists to the CEC; the other contained biographical information about individual candidates, noting whether they were independents or GCP members, and specifying the organization that had nominated them. Voters had to circle the number of the party or bloc of their preference on one ballot and the number of an individual candidate on the other. (In previous elections, voters had to cross out the name of the candidate they were voting against.)

Each of the polling places visited by Helsinki Commission staff seemed well equipped, competently run, and staffed by representatives of various parties, which sometimes also had election observers present. There were enough booths, each of which was enclosed by curtains, and only in one polling place did the small size of the building cause crowding. Some precincts had one ballot box, others had more. Voters would show their invitation or their passport to members of the precinct election commission, who would check their names against voter rolls, have the voters sign in, give them two ballots, and direct them to the booth.

The voting generally went smoothly: Helsinki Commission staff observed no procedural problems or evidence of chicanery. It was noteworthy, however, that despite frequent instructions from the CEC in the media on how to vote, many people appeared not to know what to do and needed help from members of the precinct election commission. One woman voiced disappointment at the refusal of the commission to permit her to vote for her sick mother, explaining that she had frequently done so in the

past. She seemed quite surprised to learn that the commission would, at her request, send two people to visit her mother with a small box for her two ballots.

Foreign observers were impressed with the dedication and competence of precinct election commissions. In one polling place in Tbilisi, an elderly woman asked members of the commission which party to vote for. When she pressed her request despite their refusal to tell her, one commission member entered the booth with her and, without closing the curtain, circled one of the parties and one of the candidates on her ballots. The woman left, apparently pleased to have done her civic duty; the commission member then showed the ballots to foreign observers before dropping them into the box, explaining that they would be invalid since they had not been signed by a commission member. His method of resolving the problem seemed eminently sensible to election monitors.

### Counting

Helsinki Commission staff observed the vote counting at a polling place in Tbilisi. The chairman of the precinct commission broke the box's seals in the presence of foreign observers and dumped the contents on a table. Election monitors certified that all ballots had been emptied. Commission members then divided the plain and colored ballots into two piles.

They checked them first to make sure each one had been signed on the back by a commission member and were not unmarked in front. An examination of the ballots revealed that many were invalid or were of questionable validity: people often did not follow instructions, which were clearly written on the ballots. For example, some voters crossed out a party, instead of circling the number of the party they preferred. In questionable cases, members of the precinct electoral commissions, which included representatives of different parties, would make a determination.

In counting the ballots -- which was done by hand -- commission members established the number of voters in the precinct, how many had signed in, and how many had actually voted. They then calculated the number of votes for and against parties, blocs and candidates. Also tabulated was the number of invalidated ballots, the number of ballots the precinct had received, and the number not used.

Commission members then put the ballots into different envelopes for parties, blocs and independents. They sealed the envelopes, placed them all in one large envelope and delivered it to the District Election Commission. The District Commission added up the totals from its precincts and delivered them to the Central Election Commission.

## Results

In the first round, only the Round Table and the Georgian Communist Party obtained in the proportional voting the required four percent of the vote cast to gain parliamentary representation. The Round Table won about 54 percent, or 81 seats, while the GCP garnered about 30 percent, or 44 seats.

Voting in the majoritarian system produced clear winners in 57 of a possible 125 races. Of the 57, a total of 33 were Round Table, 17 were GCP, four were independents, and Democratic Georgia, the Georgian Popular Front, and Liberation and Economic Renewal got one apiece. Run-off and repeat elections were scheduled for November 11.

In Abkhazia, where the Abkhaz Popular Front had announced a boycott on October 25, polling stations did not open at all in two districts. Polls were open in the remaining districts, but few Abkhazians or other non-Georgians came to vote. Polling places were open in all of Southern Ossetia's districts but the boycott called by Ademon Nykhas was effective. In Tskhinvali city and county, for example, only about 7,000 of 40,000 eligible voters cast ballots. A similar situation obtained in the rest of Southern Ossetia.

In the second round of elections, the Round Table increased its majority, winning another 41 seats. Georgia's Communist Party fared poorly, gaining only an additional three seats. The Georgian Popular Front added 11 to the one it had managed in the first round, for a total of 12. It was widely rumored that the GPF's surprisingly strong performance was due to an understanding with the Round Table, which had its candidates step aside for the Popular Front's nominees. The final tallies gave Democratic Georgia four seats, and the Liberation and Economic Rebirth bloc and the All-Georgian Rustaveli Society each won one seat. Nine independent candidates were elected.

Because no valid elections took place in two districts apiece in Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia, only 246 of the Georgian Supreme Soviet's 250 seats were filled after the first two rounds of voting. New elections will be held subsequently in those four districts.

Gamsakhurdia acknowledged in post-election statements his electoral difficulties with non-Georgians. In a November 14 interview, he blamed "propaganda" about Round Table enmity towards the non-Georgian population for his bloc's poor showing in Abkhazia, Borzhomi, Bogdanovka and Manavi. Gamsakhurdia offered a similar explanation for the results in Adjara, where the GCP won 56 percent of the vote to the Round Table's 24 percent. He added as contributory factors the claims that Round Table activists had been prevented from campaigning, plus intimidation by "agents of imperialist powers."

Despite these complaints, Gamsakhurdia and his bloc had reason to be satisfied. According to the Central Election Commission, about 70 percent of eligible voters had

cast their ballots and they gave the Round Table 155 of 250 seats. That the communists had managed to come in second with 64 seats, or about 25 percent, was apparently due to their relatively strong position in rural areas.

## **POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF RESULTS**

### **Significance of the Election**

Georgia's legislature had not passed a law on political parties before the election, even though the election law specifically referred to parties and means of registering them. Nevertheless, the contest was clearly a multi-party affair, and the voting was conducted in a manner designed to minimize, if not prevent, abuse and fraud. Georgia's first election since 1921 whose outcome the Communist Party did not predetermine displayed a truly impressive grasp of the mechanics and procedures of organizing a fair vote. The democratic character of the election was marred, however, by provisions in the election law that effectively barred from participation non-Georgian parties that want to redraw Georgia's borders.

Georgia's Supreme Soviet election has resulted in the loss of communist control of the legislature and a sweeping victory for the Round Table-Free Georgia bloc. Zviad Gamsakhurdia was elected chairman of the Supreme Soviet at its first session. Georgia's lawmakers have changed the republic's name to the Republic of Georgia, dropping the words "Soviet" and "socialist," and restored the state hymn, flag and seal of the 1918-1921 independent Georgian republic. More pointedly, the Supreme Soviet on November 23 rejected Mikhail Gorbachev's Union Treaty and unanimously passed a law proclaiming the inauguration of a transition period to independence. Like the Baltic States, Georgia has now gone beyond declarations of sovereignty and officially declared its intention to proceed towards full control of its destiny.

### **Zviad Gamsakhurdia**

Much of the Round Table's success clearly derives from the popularity of its leader, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, and a great deal will now depend on how he uses his mandate. The character and policy preferences of this individual politician will therefore become pivotal, a development that might be described as the "personalization of politics" in Georgia.

Gamsakhurdia's popularity with the Georgian masses and the margin of his election victory have led his detractors to paint pessimistic scenarios. They worry that Gamsakhurdia, whom they accuse of hyper-egotism, as well as anti-democratic tendencies and chauvinism, will move against his rivals within the opposition, especially Gia Chanturia. Some observers fear that any law on political parties passed by a Gamsakhurdia-dominated Supreme Soviet might ban parties that support the National Congress. In such

circumstances, they conclude, factional violence is certain to intensify and could lead to "civil war," a phrase often heard in some circles in Tbilisi.

Gamsakhurdia's admirers, of course, reject these assumptions and dismiss the fears based on them (although some groups in Georgia would probably welcome an opportunity to settle accounts with political opponents). They see Gamsakhurdia as a patriotic figure who has defeated the communists and will overcome all obstacles in leading Georgia to freedom. Optimists, as distinct from Gamsakhurdia-admirers, maintain that after 70 years of communism, nobody in Georgia favors a dictatorship by any party or individual, and that Gamsakhurdia understands the popular longing for stability and consolidation of non-communist, pro-independence forces. The same applies to nationality policies, they argue: the responsibility of being chairman of Georgia's legislature will temper any vindictive or chauvinist instincts Gamsakhurdia might have and incline him towards compromise and consensus-building.

Since his election victory, Gamsakhurdia has, in fact, taken steps in this direction. On November 3, he promised that the Georgian Supreme Soviet would conduct a conciliatory policy towards parties that had not won seats in the legislature and would not initiate confrontations with the National Congress.

### **The Georgian Supreme Soviet and the National Congress**

Despite such statements by Gamsakhurdia, tension between the Georgian Supreme Soviet and the National Congress and their respective adherents persists. The National Congress specified that it would not attempt to become an "organ of power" or an actual parliament. But the very existence of the National Congress means that Georgia has two representative bodies that deny each other's legitimacy and compete for the loyalty of the population. Moreover, Chanturia and his associates accuse Gamsakhurdia of winning the Georgian Supreme Soviet election through intimidation and fraud. The intensity of the personal animosity between Gamsakhurdia and Chanturia bodes ill for a cooperative relationship between these two politicians and institutions. When it became clear that the Round Table and the Georgian Communist Party would be the two most powerful forces in the legislature, Chanturia labeled the outcome a "new Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in Georgia."

According to Chanturia, Gamsakhurdia's allies have been compiling lists of participants in the National Congress elections and begun purging them from their jobs. Nor has the violence stopped: two members of the National Democratic Party, one of whom was beaten during the September assault on NDP headquarters and identified his chief assailant as a close ally of Gamsakhurdia, were recently shot and wounded. Ironically -- and ominously -- the individual he identified has now become the chairman of the Georgian Supreme Soviet's Committee on Defense, Security, and Law and Order Affairs.

Chanturia's spokesperson told Helsinki Commission staff that Gamsakhurdia-inspired repression was certain. It was unclear, however, whether it would take the form of arrests, "accidents," or provocations intended to produce reprisals, which might then serve to justify a full-scale crackdown. Whatever Gamsakhurdia's actual intentions towards National Congress supporters, their conviction of his malice naturally lessens any prospects for conciliation, since they would be unlikely to take at face value any olive branch he might extend.

The rivalry between the Georgian Supreme Soviet and the National Congress complicates the development of non-communist, authoritative political institutions in Georgia. The hostility and distrust between Chanturia and Gamsakhurdia threaten to dampen the commitment of Georgia's voters to democracy in general, especially if their differences turn violent. Some people interviewed in Tbilisi theorized that Moscow might introduce presidential rule in Georgia if armed clashes between these two camps lead to a total breakdown of order. Last but not least, this deep rift between two key figures in Georgia's national movement obviously benefits any forces wishing to keep Georgia in the USSR. It would be easy for Moscow, if it saw the need, to provoke a confrontation between Gamsakhurdia and Chanturia and then step in to pick up the pieces.

### **The Future of Georgian Political Parties**

No blocs or parties other than Round Table-Free Georgia and the Georgian Communist Party did well enough to win seats in parliament. The less successful contenders will now have to reappraise their future electoral prospects. In all likelihood, some of the many parties that have arisen over the last two years will simply disappear, while others will merge. Such consolidation would reflect the maturing of Georgian political consciousness and would clarify the different political strands and tendencies in the population.

The Communist Party, for its part, will also have to reassess its policies and tactics now that it has become a minority party in Georgia's legislature. Probably the most important issues it must consider are its position on the Union Treaty and its own relationship to the CPSU. The upcoming second round of the GCP's 18th congress will certainly discuss the Party's program and structure. Based on the experience of the Baltic States, which have also made clear their determination to regain independence, at least one faction of the GCP can be expected to change its name and declare its independence of the CPSU, as well as its backing for full Georgian independence.

### **The Supreme Soviet's Agenda**

Having set the clock ticking on the transition period, the Supreme Soviet will now begin preparing for an eventual declaration of independence. Well before the takeover of the legislature by non-communist parties, Georgia's sovereignty declaration claimed that

its own laws took precedence over all-union legislation. The Georgian Supreme Soviet has established a commission to draft a new constitution; it can now begin trying to replace Soviet institutions and to initiate negotiations with Moscow.

### *Transition to Market Economy*

Georgia's move towards a market economy will encounter very little opposition from residents of Georgia, at least initially, and probably little, in principle, from Moscow. But Moscow is sure to resist Georgian efforts to gain control of its natural resources and enterprises under all-union jurisdiction, to build independent economic relations with foreign countries, or to develop a Georgian currency.

### *Nationality Policy*

The Round Table's election platform calls charges of chauvinism against leaders of Georgia's national movement "a scheme worked out long ago by the center" to suppress Georgia's national-liberation processes. But as non-Georgians are already suspicious of Gamsakhurdia, his words and the Supreme Soviet's actions will be minutely examined for signs of intolerance, chauvinism and restrictive legislation.

All Georgian parties that competed in the election assume the inviolability of Georgia's territorial integrity and the Georgian Supreme Soviet will continue the policies of its predecessor in rejecting any efforts to change Georgia's borders. On November 23, it affirmed an earlier decision by the old Georgian Supreme Soviet to annul moves made in September by Southern Ossetians to change their Autonomous Oblast into the Southern Ossetian Soviet Democratic Republic. At the same time, the Supreme Soviet declared its intention of protecting the rights of national minorities in accordance with international law. But if non-Georgians keep trying to remove themselves from Georgian administrative jurisdiction and control, pressures could grow in the legislature to revoke their autonomy. Such moves will certainly cause clashes between Georgians and non-Georgians.

Ethnic tensions in Georgia and the possibility of violence are unavoidably factors in determining relations between Georgia and Moscow. Up to now, Moscow has rejected appeals from non-Georgians to change the republic's borders. The USSR Supreme Soviet decreed unconstitutional and invalid Southern Ossetian attempts to become an independent subject of the Soviet federation. But if Moscow decides to pressure Georgia, it can exploit various interethnic grievances and threaten to dismember the republic.

The election platforms of both the Round Table and the GCP demanded the regulation of immigration into Georgia. The likely adoption of such a law means, among other things, that Meskhetian Turks, who were expelled from Georgia by Josef Stalin and have long been campaigning to return, will probably not find a sympathetic ear in Tbilisi.

### *Formation of a National Army*

In September, according to people interviewed in Tbilisi, Gamsakhurdia weakened his objections to the stationing of Soviet troops in Georgia, arguing that Georgia could benefit from their presence for some time to come. On November 3, he said that Georgia would not apply any sanctions against the Soviet army and that its status in Georgia would be decided according to international law. These positions might well smooth his relations with the Soviet Ministry of Defense.

On the other hand, both the Round Table and the GCP called for the creation of national military formations and the Supreme Soviet will probably proceed along these lines. Georgia's legislature on November 15 suspended the Soviet law on universal military service. As various republics have insisted that their citizens serve within their own borders, Georgian hopes of forming national military units cannot have surprised Moscow.

But Gamsakhurdia has made some striking statements about military matters, especially given the desires voiced by some republics for nuclear-free status. The Round Table election platform calls for negotiations with Moscow over control of "strategic military objects" in Georgia. According to "Iberia," an independent Georgian news agency, Gamsakhurdia demanded at an election-eve rally that Soviet military technology be left in Georgia, free of charge.

What "strategic military objects" include is unclear, and even if the "Iberia" report is accurate, Gamsakhurdia may have spoken in the heat of the moment. Still, such statements cannot help alarming non-Georgians, as well as Georgia's neighbors, and can be used by Moscow to paint the newly elected Georgian leadership as dangerously radical.

Should Georgia proceed to create "national" military formations, a key question will be whether non-Georgians are permitted, expected or obligated to join. Considering the level of hostility towards the Georgian authorities that Helsinki Commission staff saw in Tskhinvali, capital of Southern Ossetia, it is difficult to imagine that all Ossetians would gladly serve in a Georgian army -- or that all Georgians would welcome them in the ranks.

### **The Shevardnadze Possibility**

Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze's visibility on the international scene may have dimmed memories in the West of his past careers as head of the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communist Party. In Georgia, however, many believe that he might come back to his homeland in some official and ruling capacity. Zviad Gamsakhurdia, for instance, told Helsinki Commission staff that Shevardnadze wants to be president of Georgia.



Another scenario for Shevardnadze's return assumes that relations between supporters and opponents of Gamsakhurdia will deteriorate into armed violence, leading to chaos. Moscow would then try to stabilize the situation by introducing a state of emergency or perhaps presidential rule. In either case, Shevardnadze could return as Gorbachev's viceroy, with a suitably Georgian title. A more interesting theory holds that Shevardnadze might play his own game should he become convinced that the disintegration of the USSR cannot be prevented. He might then offer his services in shepherding Georgia to independence, banking on his popularity and reputation in the West to assure international recognition and support.

However improbable such contingencies may seem to Westerners, Georgians take them seriously. Whatever they think of Shevardnadze, they respect his political skills. Few people interviewed in Tbilisi believe Shevardnadze's residence in faraway Moscow means that Georgia is not on his mind.

### **The Royal Option**

An intriguing possibility that could influence the course of future Georgian politics is a return of the monarchy. The claimant to the throne currently lives in Spain and negotiations are underway between various Georgian political groups and King Juan Carlos to arrange a trip to Georgia next summer by the scion of the Bagration dynasty. The monarchical tradition is strong in Georgia and many people interviewed expressed interest in his arrival in Tbilisi. Some political activists, especially those associated with the National Congress, speculated that a constitutional monarchy in Georgia would help scotch any efforts by Moscow to keep Georgia inside the USSR.

### **The U.S. Perspective**

For some time now, U.S. policymakers have been pondering how to react to a possible declaration of independence by a Soviet republic other than Lithuania, Latvia or Estonia, whose incorporation into the USSR no American administration has ever recognized. Now that the Georgian Supreme Soviet has rejected Gorbachev's Union Treaty and proclaimed its intention to gain independence, Georgia is one Soviet republic that could drop this difficult question in Washington's lap. Georgian political activists often asked visiting Americans whether Washington understood that the "former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics" is already a thing of the past and wondered if Georgia could count on U.S. backing and recognition.

On the other hand, Gamsakhurdia told Helsinki Commission staff that the support of the United States and the international community would be a crucial determinant of Georgia's decision to move towards full independence. From this perspective, since the Georgian Supreme Soviet envisions a transition period of at least several years' duration,

all sides -- Georgia, Moscow, and Washington -- would have time to see how the situation develops and elaborate policies accordingly.

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